SHADOWRUN

MARKET PANIC

CATALYST game labs

A SHADOWRUN CAMPAIGN BOOK

MARKET PANIC
CATALYST
game labs™

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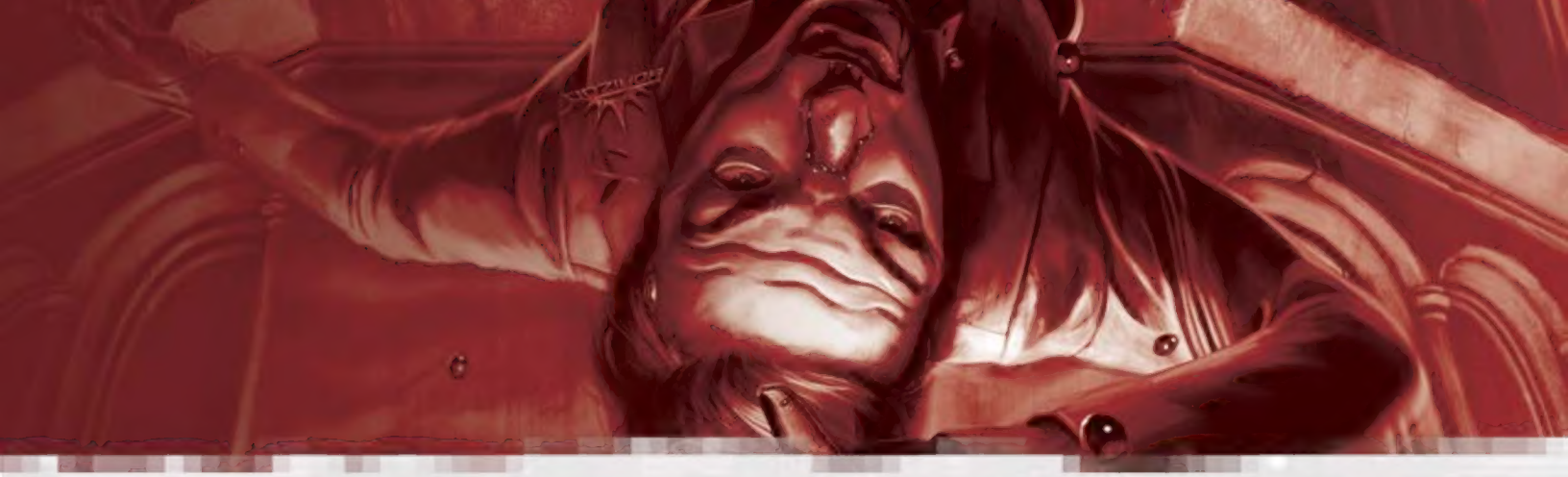

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THE FIRST DAY OF THE REST OF YOUR LIFE

Trapped in the moment, bullets shredding gentrified brownstone around him, Karl Denisovich just wants to go home. Next to him, snap-shooting around the corner is Fortinbras, caseless ammunition leaving the distinct tang in the air Karl knows from video games. The adrenaline rush is multiplied by a thousand, exponential. Clutching a real gun for the first time. Real danger. No sales reports. This is *way* better than *Awakening: 1949*.

"If the Comanche closes in on us, we'll wish we were dead, omae," Fortinbras says as he ducks back around the corner. He shows Karl a grenade. "This'll take care of that. Never let them take you alive, right?"

Karl nods uncertainly. Down the block, more Comanche Mafia appear, catching the team in a classic pincer movement. Karl knows this because he's directed such maneuvers as Sgt. "Smokin'" Joe Esterhaus, hero of Normandy. But it's different from the ground level, he thinks, as a rocket takes out the apartment directly above him. Rain of glass in slow-motion, diamond tears like in that commercial, the one for the new Stuffer Shack shake. Turns out, time slows down in these situations. Karl thought it was just something devs programmed into the game.

Pi, their decker (he liked being able to say that, "their"), bleeds out in the narrow alley between the two apartment buildings. Kaiser, their de facto leader, buzzed DocWagon three times, but the Comanche Mafia jammed their broadcast. No last-minute wagon rescues like on *STAT!* for Karl. Smokin' Joe would cowboy up, so Karl does the same. All the adrenaline surging, backed by the Dexedrine analog burning through his veins, Karl opens up on the flanking group. Slight crouch, lean into the recoil. Squeeze the trigger, don't flinch. The H&K jumps in his hands like the seizures his brother had as a kid.

Blood as he gets one in the gap between her ceramic armor plates. The woman falls. Buzzing snap of a bullet that's already passed him by the time the sound reaches his ear. Kaiser screaming in a whoop of fury and joy, his own H&K barrel glowing so white hot Karl can see the bullets raging through.

And all of it just like the game, only so much more so.

×

It's forty-eight hours earlier and Karl is just another drone hanging out with his co-workers at a 1980s-themed bar in Redmond. The place tries too hard to be ironically hip, and Karl doesn't want to be there anyway. He's afraid he's going to get fired after what he found out at the office today, so he's milking his coworkers for information, or "intel" as Shin Yamazaki calls it in *UCAS Vat Ninja Reborn*. Karl's a drone, but he's a burn-out. Lately, he thinks he missed his calling and should have run the

BY CHRIS LITES

shadows. This is, of course, how game companies sell product to people like Karl. Everyone knows you can't turn over a new leaf. Once a drone, always a drone. Karl wallows in his own existential stew. He's stuck.

The new girl, Alex, smiles at him—her sweat-slick olive skin catches the club's laser in a hyphen of reflection along her cheek. Alex likes Karl, but Karl can't see it. Right now, he can't see anything but his imminent termination. In the back of his head, he knows something else, something far more interesting is going on at work, but his limbic brain just wants to make sure he continues to have the means to pay for food and shelter and subscription coffee.

His coworkers are cagey because Karl had a reporter following him around all day like a bossy dog. The dog asks questions and the employees answer, but they are smart enough not to indict themselves with Great American Products. You only tell the press so much of the truth.

"They might downsize," says George, this big-ass ork with hair like steel wool and a history of civil disobedience. "They might downsize us now that Fuchi's bought us."

All day, with the reporter following him around, Karl, who's in sales, has been asked about his client list. Specifically, people in accounting and his bitch mage boss want to know who buys rembryos, Great American's frozen, fast-growth chicken embryos. Most of those buyers are in PBB and CAS territory.

"Someone still has to sell the rembryos," Karl says, futile hope edging his voice like a kid who knows the gift he really wanted isn't under the tree.

The reporter records everything, but neither she, nor anyone else at the table, notice the elf at the corner of the bar keeping an eye on all of them. His name is Pi, and he's about to introduce himself to Karl, but not in real time.

×

Karl could have brought Alex Kim home with him, but instead he's stuck with the reporter's bottle imp who is glued to Karl until the agreed upon twenty-four hours are up. Karl's going feature in *Puget Sounds!*, an indie magazine focusing on the neo-retro-punk-grunge scene. A day in the life of a drone—that kind of thing. He was happy about it at first, something to alleviate the growing boredom of his job, but now he's afraid it singled him out for termination.

Alastair greets him when he opens the door, "Hey, Karl. You're out of milk, and your account is almost overdrawn. You need to pay your *Awakening: 1949* fee at the end of the month. Plus, I'm not free. You lease me from the building."

Karl tells the AI to shut up and takes a long-neck Mexican

beer from the fridge. The fridge warns him the beer is not on his caloric regime and he hasn't been to the gym in more than a week. Karl tells the fridge to shut up and slings himself to his couch.

AR glasses over his eyes, the jellyfish like trodes finding his ears and neural hot points on their own. He sips the beer. He jacks in to 1949.

Paris is on fire. Nazi dragons attempting to defend the city have strafed Avenue Foch where an allied ork company tried to take the street. Tracers light the night sky, punctuated by thaumaturgical bursts from SS mages. He's a Ranger class, not an OSS mage, but he wishes he could sling a spell or two right now.

Leading his platoon to rescue the barbecued orks, brave Sgt. "Smokin'" Joe and his Banhsee Commandos move carefully toward their objective. In two-by-two cover formation, they leapfrog up the street to reach the wounded orks before the pureblood SS, who hate all metahumans, get to them. They won't be long for the world then.

The foul *shutzstaffel* waits in ambush, knowing the Allies rescue their own. An enfilade of twin MG 42 fire rakes over the platoon, followed by 9mm slugs from their MP 40s. Karl takes one in the shoulder, the game's feedback sending real pain signals to his brain. Not everyone plays on True Grit level like this, but Karl needs the full experience. Metallic blood fills his mouth lets him know the shoulder isn't the only wound. Karl lets loose with his Thompson, spraying a pair of German infantry into a fine red paste. Germany keeps this game on the *verboten* list.

Then it all slows down. For a moment, Karl thinks he's achieved a killing spree power up and gone into bullet time, but things derez around him. Pixels give in to bit rot like the fast-forward decomposition of animal corpses he saw in high school biology. It's then he sees the man in the long leather coat—surely an Ahnenerbe agent. Karl doesn't know how he missed him but hoses him down with American lead. To no effect. The bullets don't even register. It's then Karl realizes he's got a cheater on his hands. Time to dial customer service. They were supposed to have fixed this problem last month.

"Hey, omae. It's rude to go around geeking folks." The thin man smiles, teeth illuminated with a soft neon glow.

That neon isn't allowed in the game either. Anachronisms like that hurt the suspension of disbelief, and the game rated 9.5 in that on the boards.

"Your kind ruin the game," says Karl with all the condescension most people save for the SINless.

The thin guy shoots the cuffs of his leather coat. "Me? Oh." He laughs, throaty and dismissive. "You think I'm playing? No, omae. I'm here to talk to you about work."

"Great American Products?" Karl can't believe any of it and assumes he's found a glitch in the game.

That's when the man in black tells him his name is Louis 3.14 and asks if Karl wants to be a player for real.

×

Karl's late for work not by accident, but because Louis Pi told him not to vary his routine today. That was very important. Pi explained to him what was going on, or anyway what they wanted him to know about what was going on and then told him not to vary his routine. As near as Karl understands it, his mean-ass boss, Karen Albright, helps the Comanche Mafia smuggle drugs inside the DNA of the rembryos. Once born, they actually make the drug in their blood. Many are the wonders of the Sixth World.

"Wish you could have stayed later, Karl," Alex says, head turtling around the edge of his cubicle. The cubicle AI, a big, anime-looking mouse head, says, "Should I leave you two alone?"

"No!" Karl says. "I mean yes. Okay. For a minute." Don't vary your routine. He always talks to Alex and begins to wonder if maybe she has a thing for him. Last night's visit from Pi cut through the layers of paranoia surrounding the possible loss of his job and down into things he hasn't thought about in a long time—things like girls, specifically Alex, and how much he really has hated his job for the last year.

"Sorry I had to ... uh ... leave, Alex." He tags it with a smile, his inner salesman kicking in like an involuntary response.

"Maybe you'd like to go out for drinks tonight?" She fidgets. "I mean all of us. You know. Again?"

"I don't think I can." Her face falls. "Okay, then." She leaves. Karl feels bad, but that adrenaline rush he gets in-game starts to come on again like a wave—hairs on his scalp tingle, his legs buzz. He's participating in corporate espionage!

What Louis Pi said comes back. "Take out the data stick. Slip it in the port. AI will go goofy on you, but this virus will let me take him over. All you have to do is wait. Listen to the AI. To me."

Karl does. Takes stick. Slots it. Waits. Ten seconds, maybe less, and the AI fades, then comes back. "We're done." Then it blinks, anime-exaggerated features showing a creased brow and confusion. "I'm sorry, Karl. What were we talking about?"

"Nothing, don't worry."

Karl eyes Albright over the cliff face of his particleboard wall. There's a picture there of his brother, age sixteen, before he ran off and joined the UCAS Marines. He used to have an anarchy symbol, really a band logo, on the wall, too, but that went against company policy.

Albright paces, talking into the air to someone he cannot hear. He hasn't seen her panicked before, and the effect is more upsetting than her usual yelling at him. At least with screaming, you're on familiar ground.

She slices the air with her hand like a vat ninja in trideo, killing the call. Snatches her purse like a bird going for prey and storms out of her office, her path the quickest route between her office door and the elevator.

The moment the elevator dings, his AI's eyes snap open. "Karl, can you hear me?" It's Pi's voice, but coming out of the AI's mouth.

"Pi?"

"Don't say my name out loud. Turn down the volume and put on your air con." Karl's face must be one of consternation because Pi says, "White noise." Karl nods, and Dotty, his nosiest coworker, looks over at him—like being spotted by the principal looking at Sally Markson's budding breasts in sixth grade. Sally later turned into a troll.

"You have the stick?" Pi's voice barely registers through the DIY white noise. Karl says he does. "You have to pee."

"I do?"

"Yes, go to the bathroom. There's going to be a fire alarm in one minute." Karl complies, finding that the heightened tension

has, indeed, made his bladder want a letting. When he's zipping up, the alarm goes off.

Pi's avatar, the standard mathematical symbol, appears on his phone. Text now: *Wait twenty seconds, then go into Albright's office.*

Karl does. The department is spooky without the staff here, like an airport pre-dawn. In Albright's office, he takes the same stick, slots it, and enters the commands Pi relays to him.

"That's it." Voice now, through the commlink. "We have the hard location for the formula."

"I can go?"

"Who you talking to, Karl?" Dotty, her bulk filling the doorway to Albright's office.

Karl waits for his salesman module to kick in, but it doesn't. He comes up short. "Oh, hey, Dotty ..."

"I noticed you weren't with us. I came back up here, *against* policy, to see if you were all right." She says "against policy" like confessing to violating one of the more serious Ten Commandments.

"Ignore her. Get out." Pi again.

"What was that?" Dotty steps into the office.

"We should go, Dotty." But she shakes her head. Pulls out her 'link. "I'm calling security. You aren't supposed to be in here."

And right then is where something toggles inside Karl. Some fundamental desire, long suppressed, is at last uncaged. He hits Dotty the way he did a German sentry two weeks ago in 1949, just right. She goes down. He takes her 'link on instinct and hits the elevator. Gets off two floors above ground level and hoofs it down to avoid lobby security.

"That's good, Karl. That's very good. You're a natural."

✖

In *Run, Run, Runner*, they call it legwork, and you're always working contacts, hacking into databases and going clairvoyant with some astral fetish or another. Here, in a medium-priced room at a Taj Motel, it's just Pi with his commlink, going over the plan again. Karl suspects it's for his benefit—the rest of the team seems to have it down.

The plan is, as Karl understands it, simple—or simple to them. Karl shows up at the server farm in Redmond where Great American Products leases five cubic feet of storage. He says he's there to access his sales database because the fire alert locked everything down. The guard sees he's been flagged because of the Dotty incident, and security comes down on him. The rest of the team waits in ambush, takes them out, non-lethal, and enters. Gets to the server where Pi manually patches in using Karl's retinal scan. They hope that hasn't been locked down yet.

"I still don't understand, why me?"

"Because," Pi says, "you're disgruntled, intelligent and you want this, Karl. You really, really *want* this. Besides, your psych profile reads like a vet with PTSD. If you know how to read it right."

Fortinbras assures him no plan is ever simple. "No plan survives contact with the enemy," Karl says, channeling his inner Smokin' Joe.

"Exactly," PI says and slaps him on the back.

✖

All of that leads to right fragging now. Fortinbras is bleeding the death of a thousand fragmentation cuts, and Pi is dying. A Dutch street samurai, whose name Karl cannot pronounce, is already dead. Their mage is on her last legs, slinging a few balls of glittering light at the Comanche. Karl remembers an old movie, the two-dimensional kind, where Native Americas were the bad guys and cavalry in blue came to save the day. Karl doesn't see that happening.

"Exfil now!" Fortinbras shouts, trying to lift Pi. It isn't happening. The message isn't getting out either, still jammed,

Then a chopper comes in, flown low, Karl learns later, by some former UCAS jock who never left the jungles of Guatemala. Prop wash comes down on them like the mother of all gales, but it's nothing compared to what comes down on the Comanche. The chopper's a gunship, and it lights up the neighborhood with rockets and tracers. The Comanche disappears in pieces and brief streaks of blood and loops of intestines.

Fortinbras struggles to lift Pi. Again, the world slows. Karl spies a wounded Comanche shouldering an RPG. For the second time that day, a switch is thrown inside Karl. If you could look in his eyes, you'd see it's like a light going on behind his baby blues.

Deep breath. Select single fire with your thumb. Aim. Fire. Single shots in the abdomen crawl upward with recoil until he's shot the man in the face, the faceplate designed to protect him serving to contain the awful splash of brains and blood. Somehow, with the world slow the details sharpen, and Karl thinks he can ever read the man's lips before he dies, "I'm hit..."

The other survivors return fire.

Still on his killing-spree high, Karl helps Fortinbras pick up Pi. He does it because Smokin' Joe would, because he wants to show Fortinbras he can, because he's never felt so precisely in the moment as now, never felt the click of karmic Legos sealing like fate. Karl knows this is where he's always belonged.

Amazingly, he makes it, the door gun drone keeps suppressive fire on the combatants below. Laughing then, just pure laughter like he hasn't ever felt, climbs up and out of him.

It takes a moment before he realizes Karen Albright sits on the bench opposite him. "Karl fragging Denisovich," she says. "I never did like you."

"Why you here?" He has to shout to be heard over the props.

"Comanche was going to geek me now that the jig is up. But you boys have the formula, don't you?" She smiles, and he's never been happy to see her until just now.

Fortinbras nods, winces from pain and says, "Maybe we can work something out."

"Bet your ass we will, chummer," Karen says and looks out the door over the city. Karl's gaze follows.

Wind in his hair as the chopper dekes under a bridge and plays it tight to the ground, nap of the Earth. Straight out to the Sound, now, as the sun goes down and the Space Needle silhouettes itself against the sun like the mother of all logos. He's done working for logos. Karl expects the credits to roll right now, but they never do. ✖

DRONING ON

- Understanding a corp is not just about understanding the leaders. That helps you see what the culture of the place might be, but in a megacorp you have millions of employees in thousands of locations divided into hundreds of divisions and subsidiaries, and only a handful of people at the top. You're going to run into the day-to-day workers a whole lot more than the leaders. When you break into an Ares research facility, Damien Knight is not going to be sitting there to greet you. When you infiltrate a Horizon PR firm, Gary Cline won't be working security. So the first group of people we really need to understand are the workers, the people who the megacorp exploits for their ever-growing profits, and who somehow convince themselves to be okay with this. So let's take a deep look into the life of a corporate drone to see what makes them tick. As our guide, we'll use an article from *Puget Sounds!*, a digital newspaper that for some reason imitates the look of a last-century print newspaper. We'll also welcome in a few guests who got to know Karl, as you'll see. Read on and enjoy!
- Glitch

DISPATCHES FROM THE EDGE:

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF KARL DENISOVICH

BY RHONDA EHNDS

WAKING UP

As usual, at six o' clock in the morning, Karl Denisovich's apartment AI cheerfully wakes him. It isn't until later that they get into an argument. Karl Denisovich opens his eyes, looking directly at the bottle imp our editor assigned to him. Your loyal reporter meets him in an hour, but we at *Puget Sounds!* want to give you the raw feed.

Karl lives in a forty story con-apt in Pulyallup, a pricey 500-square-foot rental that caters to corporate "drones." Karl is a corporate drone, though there is some debate as to the political correctness of the term. Several of the Triple As have mounted campaigns to stop the use of the word in the media, but *Puget Sounds!* is an indie rag. What they don't like doesn't matter much to us.

- Hahaha. These "independent journalists" crack me up. You really think they'd get access to Karl's workplace without corporate approval and, most probably, sponsorship? I have a Space Needle to sell you if you think that, chummer.
- Cosmo

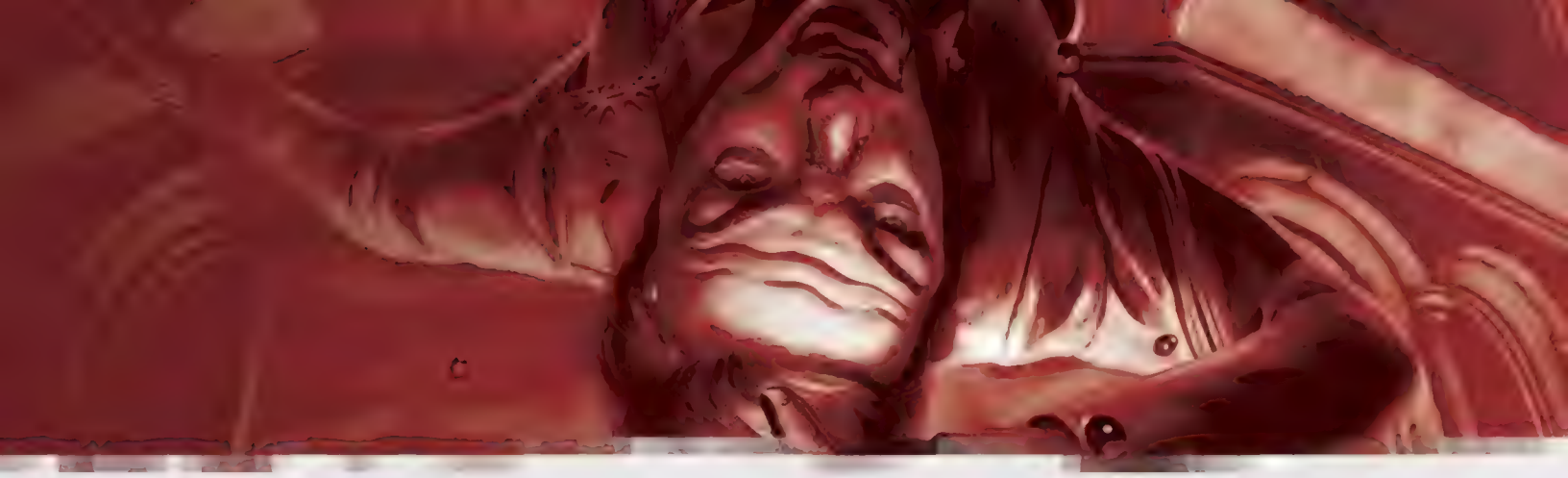
This is his life. One day in his life-and Karl, for those of you who worry about labels, is fine with the term "drone."

"It's the right term for the condition," he says. "And it *is* a condition. I sit in a cubicle lost among many other cubicles. We look like a wasp factory, except we're square instead of hexagonal. I wanted to be a Fuchi *astronaut* when I grew up, you know?" Karl is five foot, ten inches tall, thirty-two years old, and he makes the median wage for his corporation. That wage is less than a fiftieth of what those at the top make, but it also could feed dozens of Seattle's SINless for a year, to give you some perspective. Your faithful journalist doesn't make this much. What does he have to do to take in that kind of nuyen?This is what tenty-four hours in a drone's life looks like. This is the path most of you *didn't* take.

- My daddy told me about the days when journalism was "unbiased." I never did believe him about that. Why should I? He also said news anchors didn't have corporate sponsors when he was a kid, and we all know *that's* dragondrek. Hell, you can practically see the Ares logo on Oliver Ortega's forehead.
- Sounder

- Journalism is never unbiased. What it struggles with is how to deal with the bias, and how much of it to acknowledge.
- Sunshine

Karl literally rolls out of bed, like it's too much for him to face the day. Once on the hardwood floor, he blinks and stares back up at the ceiling. His feed comes on.



"Alastair," he tells the apartment AI, "soykaf, please."

His AI is worryingly calm with a back tone of snide. "You didn't make the club this month, Karl. A new tenant beat you in the vote." Karl's building subscribes to a members-only soykaf club called Scent of Columbia, which reputedly tastes more like real coffee than what you normally purchase at Soybucks. Each month, tenants of a given con-apt vote anonymously for who in the building gets access. These soykaf clubs only give out so many memberships. This keeps them exclusive.

"Why did they vote me out?" Karl asks, more to the universe than Alastair.

"You aren't very popular, Karl. To be honest, you've also let yourself go. The building gym only has you logged for six hours last month. Everyone on the intranet can see that when they vote."

"I *work* seventy-two hours a week."

"Really, Karl, please. Everyone works seventy-two hours a week. You have a warm bed, a roof over your head and a projected lifespan of 90.2 years."

"You sound like my father."

I'll spare our loyal readers the details, but suffice to say that the conversation degenerates into an argument between Karl and Alastair. Alastair then turns the water to ten degrees Celsius while Karl is in the shower. No soykaf (since he wasn't aware about not making the building club, Karl hadn't laid in any supplies of instant soykaf in his home), but the water temperature is a wake-up. I had to heat my shower water on the stove this morning, by the way.

Karl dresses in nano-grown cotton button downs and Kong Wal-Mart ties—the Young Executive line. These are popular among drones of a certain aspirant level. I'm sure you own one yourself, loyal reader. <barf>

- Snorting zip tracks leads to a 0.3 percent increase in satisfaction!
- Turbo Bunny

THE COMMUTE

Any drone living outside an arc commutes to work. Advertising lauds Seattle's public transportation system, but the reality is somewhat different. Karl's day is a good example of the cognitive dissonance between the hype and the actual experience. You ever see a SINless elf puking in the back of a bus on the billboards?

Today is the first day of the expiration of the Metahuman/Human Jobs Rights Act. The bill expired yesterday and has yet to be renewed by the city.

Strikes are, of course, illegal, but some transit workers have summoned the courage to use one of their precious sick days all on the same day. The lack of drivers is slowing the system down a bit, plus there seem to be an inordinate amount of slow-moving pedestrians today,

DRESSING TO BLEND

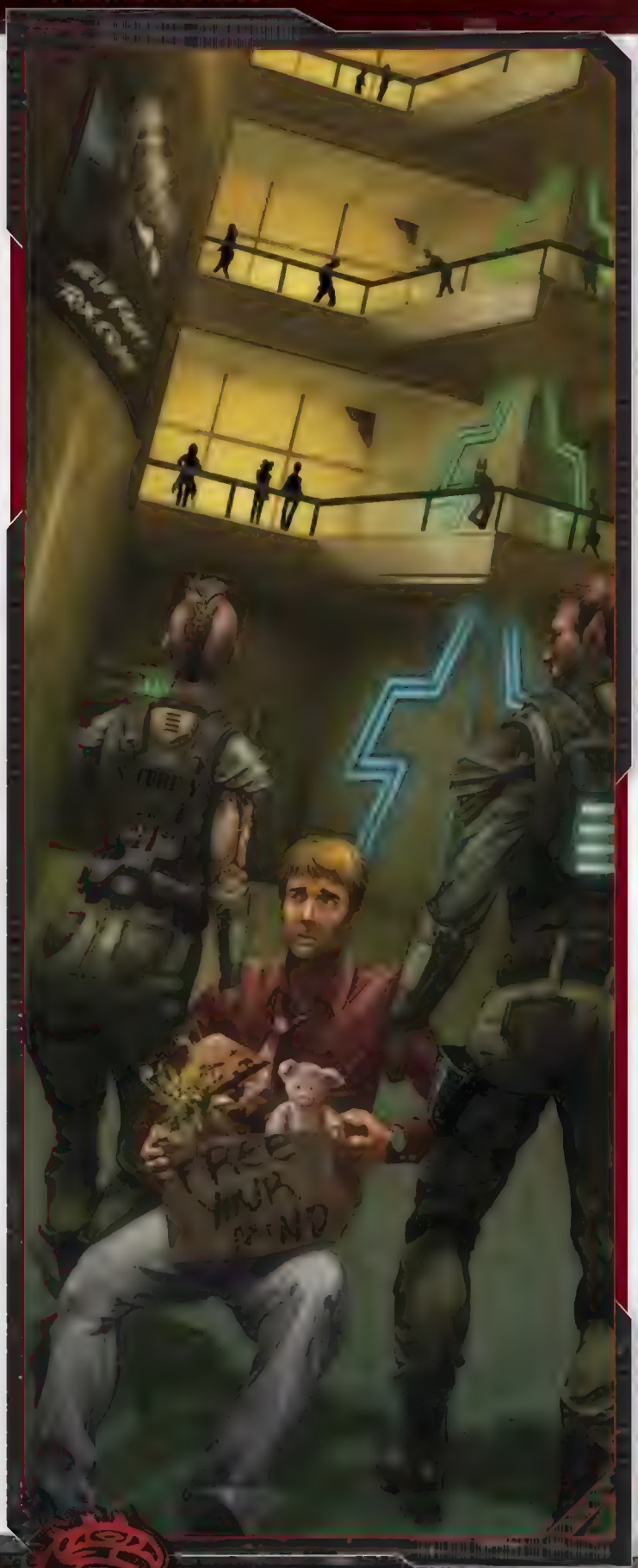
Several fashion designers cater to corporate dress codes, each designer trying to fit an outfit into as many different dress codes as possible. This produces a bland, generic-looking product that has all hints of actual fashion surgically removed. It's the classic suit as distilled through years and years of copies, degraded to the point of utter forgettability.

Men and women's ties are the only sartorial spot offering a touch of personal flair and, while not all corps allow personalized ties, those that do track a 0.08 percent increase in employee satisfaction while at work.

THE METAHUMAN/HUMAN JOBS RIGHTS ACT

For those of you on a media cleanse for the last three weeks, the Metahuman/Human Jobs Rights Act forbade the use of self-driving public transportation in Seattle for the last three years. As soon as the act expired, Renraku re-asserted its contract with the city, and updated software was reinstalled on all public transit systems.

For those of you old enough to remember, a similar movement took place early in the century against the automation of taxis. We all know how that how that turned out.



taking plenty of time to stroll in front of buses, keeping them from completing their rounds. The smart money says that some of these slow pedestrians are transit workers who have called in sick, demonstrating a form of protest in an area where actual protest is not allowed, but no proof of that has emerged. Karl spends ten minutes waiting for a bus. When it arrives, an ork crosses in front of it and then stops, making a show of huffing and heaving for breath. The ork sees Karl looking his way and shoots a glare back.

"Got a problem?" the ork asks.

Karl blinks. "Not me, omae." He smiles, some of his salesman's charm evidencing itself, aimed right at the ork. I see the scene go down. Karl and I were supposed to meet ten minutes ago on the metro platform, but the bottle imp 411'd me as to his location when he didn't show. It's all wiz, I only got up during fragging *daylight* hours for this.

The ork looks ready to tussle. I give him the alphanumerics of another reporter and tell him to call her if he wants to talk about anything. He grudgingly slumps away, his LEDs winking in early morning drizzle.

Karl makes an apology about his negligent attention to the news cycle, and we descend into the subway. I let the bottle imp rest on my shoulder; he might come in handy later if Karl wants to have a private moment. We've been granted all access, after all. I intend to take full advantage of that for you, my loyal readers.

- Yeah, "all access" so long as their corporate masters sign off on the article. You think it'd have even been filed if it had things they didn't want included? No matter how much you think you're seeing the "life of a drone," I assure you, what you're seeing is sanitized.
- Aufheben

"The thrum of the subway is something that synchs with the precise vibration of one's own molecules. You feel symbiotic down here, a part of the city like you never do above," Karl tells me. His every sentence is a plea to some other life, though I don't think he realizes this. We lie to ourselves as much as the corps lie to us.

"I want kaf," he says. Some truths, of course, seep through.

This morning's commuter tide remains locked in the private world of their feeds. Twice now, Karl pulled out his commlink only to apologize and sheepishly put it away. I tell him to pretend I'm not here. "We want to capture the raw experience."

"Of what?"

"Being you."

He doesn't know what to make of that, and his eyes find the subway windows crawling with adverts and news. His gaze causes one pane to lock, showcasing a story about the Tacoma Liberation Front. An elf in a black mask speaks through a voice baffler, "We won't rest until Tacoma is a Free City, like Denver." The anchor com-

MARKETING TARGETS

The typical drone is very different from a shadowrunner. Key among these differences are the data trails a drone leaves behind in their passage through the world.

Where a shadowrunner makes every effort to stay off of the grid or manipulate it when they go on, drones rely on such ubiquitous monitoring. The subway windowpane scanned Karl's SIN and immediately called up a feed tailored to his interests. The advertising featured on this feed is likewise tied directly to his consumer profile.

Data companies go to great lengths to track the minutiae of a drone's life. Corporations rely on drones not only to work but to buy. Drones make up seventy percent of the consumer market. After all, how many SINless can afford the nuyen for soykaf subscriptions?

Every drone opts in merely by working for a company and adopting that lifestyle. Some even pay for better profiling services so that they can always see things relevant to them. Drones are tracked from the moment they wake until the moment they go to bed. Advanced algorithms collate the data with fine-tuned filters, sifting through strata of accumulated meaninglessness of a day and somehow construing purpose and predicting future behavior.

While ubiquitous observation is among the myriad reasons people step into the shadows, this tracking provides valuable clues as to how a runner can manipulate a drone. After all, beneath the preferences for certain deodorants, film genres, dining choices and Stuffer Shack Specials lays a comprehensive psychological profile of every drone. A decker who gets their hands on these has a wealth of Machiavellian points of entry into that subject's psyche.

VIRTUAL TRAUMA DISORDER

Virtual trauma disorder (VTD) is a rare acquired condition similar to PTSD but produced entirely by virtual experiences. Gaming experiences, in particular, excite certain regions of the brain that form neural patterns—like paths plowed in wheat fields—that loop back on themselves in real life situations. Some small numbers of these paths are considered "traumatic."

Studies have shown a similarity between the brains of combat veterans and VTD sufferers. Dr. Mel Holme of Las Vegas University believes the disorder most commonly manifests in those prone to combat-like behavior or stances. In layman's terms, the doctor theorizes that a small number of VTD sufferers might have made excellent soldiers.

- "Might have made?" UCAS has been on this for a decade. Hell, they put out some of those Brothers in Arms games precisely to find soldiers. You get yourself these games in some of the double-wides out of Gainesville, the slums of Seattle, and you find some potential crack troops with no future but the dole … and that's if the dole isn't full up.

  Corps are on to it, too, though they can afford to be a bit choosier. They recruit out of the ranks of the pros at the lower levels. S&K has a whole program devoted to making games that'll specifically excite regions of the brain mentioned in the article. Sad thing is, only, like, five percent of the people who get VTD would make good corp troops and agents. That leaves ninety-five percent fragged without treatment. S&K isn't going to pay to fix VTD for someone they don't plan to hire and train. Scope that, chummers.
- Dr. Spin

ments about a bombing last week in that same treaty city. The TLF claimed responsibility. The rest of the world scrolls by in the ticker, a multifarious litany of fluff and dread.

I ask if Karl is interested in politics and he shakes his head, but it's rare the algorithms make a mistake. Yet, too overt an interest in a terrorist organization such as TLF could get a drone fired. The drone's life is dedicated to staying within a narrow bar graph of normality. Anomalies stand out and are called up for performance reviews.

Karl takes a deep sigh after looking at his phone.

"What?"

"Nothing. Just my brother."

Karl's brother was, like Karl, on track for a corporate life until he dropped out of Washington State University two years ago and all but disappeared. Karl gets cryptic, and sporadic, texts from him. His father constantly worries.

"Never mind," he says, putting the phone away as the train stops and two leatherboys from a go-gang get on.

Both of their red leather jackets shine under the train's incandescents. They prowl the car like lions, eyes crawling over each of us. They settle on a smaller woman an sitting across from us and start to hassle her.

Karl starts blinking rapidly, like some kind of allergic reaction. His hands twitch, but he doesn't do anything. Karl, clearly, plays too many games. We've all seen this before, haven't we, loyal readers?

THE WORK DAY BEGINS

Karen Albright, the senior manager of Karl's department, eyes him as he comes in with me in tow right in the middle of the corporate hymn. The CEO, direct from Singapore via hologram, leads the team in the catchy lyrics.

CORPORATE SING-ALONGS

Some corporations have hymns, more commonly called "theme songs" in most corpspeak. These are inevitably arranged by some B-list composer fallen on hard times. Most employees roll their eyes at such things, but the corporate culture has this particular custom ingrained like a tick.

The overall significance of the theme song is likely minimal, but it's the tip of a vast iceberg of corporate psychological manipulation of their employees. The corps want their employees happy—or at least thinking they are—while at work. A happier employee is a more productive one, and psychological engineering is very good at keeping drones happy.

Karl is an example of a drone living "a life of quiet desperation," but he should not be thought of as typical. While many drones are no doubt dissatisfied, a great many more enjoy the security blanket a corporation provides. Hours may be long, but the company offers benefits— travel and hotel vouchers or real vacations, daycare for children, recreation rooms, "play time," and many other progressive innovations. This is not to say any given AAA wouldn't cut their competitor's throat given the chance, only that the corporations on top tend to have the most advanced means of keeping their employees content if not happy.

Albright is a wagemage fast-tracked to promotion on the corporate ladder. She's two years younger than Karl and already looking at this department—sales and client retention—in the rearview. Karl's last performance review wasn't abysmal—he ranked in the lower middle in his department—but Albright takes a special dislike to him, or so he claims. Over the course of the day, I'll come to know he's right.

The hymn ends, everyone trailing off to their given cubic meter of corporate real estate. Karl tries to scatter with the crowd, and I'm reminded of animal documentaries where the herd runs, and the lion only gets one of them. Karl is that unfortunate wildebeest today.

"Late again, Karl." Not a question.

"The buses were shut down due to a strike," his voice weak, his heart not in it.

"Everyone knew the strike was coming. You should have left early. I messaged your AI, what's his name, Albert, because I knew you'd forget."

"Sorry?"

"I'll throw a hex on your ass, Denisovich, so your privates shrivel and shrink."

"My ex beat you to it."

Her eyes narrow. She'll have her reckoning with Karl, but not today.

Karl takes another of his deep sighs—I'm getting used to them—and sits down in his Singaporean self-articulating chair. The company he works for—Great American Products—was bought last month by one of the triple-As, a minor acquisition, but a major change for the smaller corp.

The parent company already installed these new, massaging, chakra charmed, karma-infused chairs. They get mages by the dozen to wave chicken bones and boar intestines over them somewhere in the jungles of East Asia. At least that's what it says when you scan the bar code.

"This chair," Karl tells me, "is the first step in a host of changes. A smaller corp like mine gets bought, the owners don't change everything at once. They used to, back in olden times. Got so bad for employees trying to adjust they called it 'corporate culture shock.' This ancient company had therapists come in to deal with an employee that totally lost it, exposed himself and committed suicide in the break room."

Karl knows many things, and even I, no expert in corporate culture, can see his talents are likely being wasted in Sales and Client Retention. Yet he would have been screened upon hiring. Why did he end up here?

When asked about his goals with the company, Karl says, "I used to have ambitions, but lately I think, what's the point? Do I want Albright's job? I mean, what's that about? Yelling at people? I don't want that."

Karl was recruited out of college and from depths of a drama program—not your typical corporate trajectory. Yet many companies in the 2060s began turning to the humanities in an attempt to shake up stale corporate bands. Humanizing the corporation became the new fad, and Karl was one of thousands scooped up in this new initiative.

That background landed him an internship and, eventually, a job in sales. Once upon a time, his path looked clear—he was good with people, liked by coworkers, and exceeded his quotas. Over the last months, his performance reviews began to slip until Karl's "employee graph" looked like the run up to a ski jump at the Enhanced Olympics—steeply angled downward.

He catches himself then, realizing he's perhaps said too much, but I reassure him that everything he says is cleared by the company. He cannot be punished.

"They have other ways of getting you." Another patented sigh. "I need a soykaf."

I wonder if he remembers the bottle imp was watching his soykaf debacle this morning.

THE BREAK ROOM

Clean. Hospital clean, almost antiseptic smelling were it not for the cool forest pine odor pumped in via the vents. It's subtle, but you can detect it if you focus. This is the break room, a relatively spacious area whose walls display the images of that selfsame pine forest mimicked in the air. Birds chirp faintly.

The fridge looks like what you'd see in a suburban home, but I know few of the decorations magnetized to its face are authentic. Great American Products contracts a Swiss design firm called FLARE to make these fridges look homey. There's a picture seemingly drawn by a young child—a yellow crayon-squash of a sun and stick-figure family. A paper with an A grade is just slightly skewed. Among these faux-familial bits are official corporate printouts. They use the antiquated print form because, again, it's more "humanizing." The fridge can, of course, display whatever the owner wishes but, in this case, the owner wants to evoke the previous century.

A short, Asian-American elf is leaning on the corner of the breakfast nook, sipping a cola. She fidgets nervously when Karl enters, the way girls do when they like a fellow.

She is Alex Kim, a recent graduate of the U of W and, like Karl, recruited out of a humanities program—in Kim's case, sociology. She compiles client data and applies

MISFILED EMPLOYEES

A corp fits a person not only to what they want, but to what their algorithms and mages predict is the best position for them. A small number, like Karl, slip through the cracks and get, as upper management calls it "misfiled."

- That's how we first got on to Karl—he was a "misfile." One of the recruiters keeps a blog she thinks is secret, and we sussed it out. I used some chaos math and filtered down to six or so candidates.
- Louis 3.14

Misfiles are likely to be unhappy, or at least more likely, so if you're scoping a department for a weak link to turn into an asset, see if you can find files tagged with that humanizing little moniker "misfile," or whatever similar label the corp your're investigating uses.

CHARTING PROGRESS

Employee graphs are an internal way of visualizing data on any given worker. The general direction of the graph, up or down, coupled with the degree of inclination or declination, gives managers a quick précis of an employee's past performance and projected performance.

Someone on their way up is less likely to succumb to the bribes or threats of a shadowrunner. Someone on their way down, however, can make a prime target. Karl Denisovich's file marked him as a dead-ender, but he still has corporate access. That is worth exploiting.

As a redundancy, many corporations began to restrict access for employees with less-than-optimal looking graphs. There is therefore a small window of time during which runners can best exploit an employee seemingly on their way to the bottom.

TOP TEN BTL CHIPS FOR DRONES, 2077

1. *Maria Mercurial MXX*
2. *Slade the Sniper: On the Road* (Revenge fantasy)
3. *Geeked and Back Again* (Zombie sim)
4. *Life and Times of Hart Overstreet* (Private-eye porn)
5. *Acid Warp* (Augmented reality)
6. *My Sasquatch Lover* (Sub/dom fantasy)
7. *Just Like Old Times* (Emulates old street drugs.)
8. *Your Executive Life* (Boss around your boss. Power fantasy)
9. *The Shadows Know* (Shadowrunner sim)
10. *American Days* (1950s sim. Policlub sponsored)

various filter programs to best sort the "hot button" triggers" that make them buy.

"Hoi, Alex," Karl says, and I instantly realize he is unaware of the girl's attraction to him. Like a homing missile, Karl makes for the soykaf machine. It doesn't work.

"Dotty," Alex says.

"They took it away?"

"I told you they wouldn't let her talk that way about the company, and we all joined in."

"I didn't." You can almost hear the whine.

"They call that collateral damage, Karl." She smiles, then quickly hides it away behind her soda-can.

ALL-SEEING EYES

When you sign on with a corporation, you sign on for constant surveillance. Most of this is so passive that a drone never notices it, but they know it is there. In fact, if it weren't, they might even miss it.

A variety of tiny cameras are all over the modern office—including in the employee commlinks, which supervisors and security typically can access. The vast majority of the available cameras have both video and audio recording capabilities. Ostensibly, these measures exist to prevent corporate espionage. In practice, they listen in on the incidental conversation between employees.

Anyone speaking poorly of the corporation is logged and noted. In a secret code, this is filed in their employee dossier and even affects the Employee Graph. While not strictly "legal," this surveillance is nonetheless common.

Corporations rarely take direct action against such employees, though their displeasure is made known in a variety of ways. Often, they punish the entire department by creating mandatory extra hours, killing access to certain areas of the Matrix and, as in Karl's case, removing vending machines or rendering beverage machines inert.

- Check this out, omae. My team and I once cottoned on to a neo-anarchist group on local campuses who purposefully got in on corporate recruiting tours, only to vandalize the insides of said corps with nano-paint that wouldn't appear until the next day. Anyway, we slipped one of them some nuyen to break the vending machine, so we could conveniently come in and fix it as "official Sixth World Cola repair-techs."

  We set up our recon inside the machine, and boy did it pay off. Long story short—too late, I know—the employees thought the corporation was punishing them and had a fit at work the next day. Heh. The drones needed a good shakeup.
- Louis 3.14

Karl looks visibly shaken, deflated almost, as if this latest barrier to coffee knocks the existential scaffolding from under his feet. "Dotty," he says.

A large ork pushing his expiration date comes in. His long gray hair isn't corporate approved. He looks, by all appearances, to have been a neo-hippie. You can imagine him, his hair just as long but full of color, waving flags against the UCAS military actions of his day.

"George," Karl says and nods.

"Dotty," he says, looking with ire at the soykaf machine. "She talks too much. Makes us all look bad."

Alex shrugs. "Nothing we can do about it. Frag it." Swearing doesn't become the young elf. She says it like the word is laced with the bitterest of lemon.

George smiles. "Frag her indeed. You know where that term comes from?"

"Sure," Alex says, "old video games. Everyone knows that."

George shakes his head. Karl leans over and whispers to me, "We're going to get a history lesson now," but he doesn't sound like he minds.

"About a hundred years ago, back when all this was a single country, they had a war with another place over in Southeast Asia. The troops they sent, well, they were what we'd call 'under poor management' much of the time. So, you get yourself an officer that's getting the men killed, and they'd set a fragmentation grenade up in his sleeping quarters. They set it up trapped to the door. Your bad management type, he comes in and boom! No more officer."

George looks around the room as if to make sure the omnipresent cameras are catching this. He's big, and strong even at his age, and there is little mistaking this as anything but a threat. The next day, I'm told, the soykaf machine is back on.

- If anyone thought the restoration of the machine had anything to do with George's talk, they have an overinflated notion of how much influence drones have.
- Cosmo

Karl looks at his phone. Lunch is still two hours away.

"I just wanted a soykaf, damn it." He says and marches out.

"Everybody just wants something," George says. I see Alex watch Karl as he goes, her cheeks flushing as her eyes catch mine.

THE CONFERENCE CALL

The room is a long ellipsoid centered on what the company assured me is a real redwood table cloned from the originals. The whole room looks like it belongs in the galley of one of those sailing galleons, the sort you see in British Naval sims. Most of the department is gathered here, each wearing lightweight, nearly invisible telepresence glasses.

MORE ABOUT GEORGE

It turns out George—full name George Kezmaki-Kline—fought in some of the UCAS wars he later protested. When he came back from those wars, he joined the neo-hippie movement. Said movement, for those of you too lazy to search, preached peace through the shared reality of the Matrix. Early proponents of the Matrix were idealistic enough to believe that the shared network would remain free. Tell that to your omaes, loyal readers.

After the movement fizzled, George, along with many others, took jobs where they could. Some sold out and went corporate.

These vets have tactical skills, and those who were neo-hippies are anti-corporate by nature. When they were hired, screening methods were not nearly so advanced, and many were simply grandfathered in as time passed.

A word to smart runners: If you scope these men and women properly, you could have a very handy asset that might even be able to cover their tracks.

- That ain't no lie. You have to sift through the data or work your contacts to find the right vet/neo-hippie, but finding one is like finding a password site that isn't a corporate fake.

  These fellows are mostly older, though, and it's hard to put one over on them. I don't care how slick you think you are, chummer, a man gets to be upwards of seventy, he's learned a thing or two about bulldrek. Being upfront with theses types is usually the better method.
- Turbo Bunny

Today, the meeting is taking place in Trafalgar Square, London. You can hear the gulls, soft white backs like a carpet of snow across the square. There's that statue there, the one of that admiral—Nelson, the glasses inform me with a caption—and I decide the CEO has a fetish for nineteenth-century naval kitsch.

The sky is gray, that downcast melancholy color you get over the Sound sometimes. I've never been to London physically, but the first impression is it looks a lot like Seattle if Seattle were a thousand years older. The weather, anyway, seems the same. I can almost smell the rain in the air, but these rigs do not actually have scent modules

A man in a black suit strides across the square, and the gulls, as if choreographed, take off in a great shoal. They whirl above. The man, who insists Albright call him Eddy, is an elf with skin the color of a light latte. He makes a point of shaking everyone's hand, the conference room crew having worn haptics.

He even stops at me, his eyes studying me carefully. "And I understand you're our journalist for the day. A day

in the life of our"— and here he pauses, obviously reading a display on his end—"Karl here. Well, I cannot stress enough how we depend on the women and men in the trenches. They're the real backbone of Great American Products." His posh accent and subtle charm almost make me believe him.

An hour later, the meeting is dragging. Judging by some of the other floating eyes in the room, I am not the only one bored. Karl, however, has his eyes locked intently on Mr. Eddy Singh. He really seems absorbed, and I think he's using the spotlight *Puget Sounds!* provides to attempt to reboot his career. It's only when he winces, a micro-expression really, that I look down at his hand in the haptics and realize he's playing a game. I don't know how he managed to insert it without detection. He knows his way around the corporate AIs better than I thought.

Eddy Singh drones on about client relationships and providing that "intangible quality" other competitors do not. He uses that word a lot, intangible. My own eyes have drifted back to the sky and the whirling flock of gulls pockmarking the gray sky. One moves in a tighter pattern, a roving predator above Trafalgar Square. It sees me seeing it and abruptly rejoins the fold. What was that about? More on that later, loyal reader.

LUNCH

When I was in journalism school, a professor told the class that every story is a variation of Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey. If that's true, this story is the quest for a cup of quality soykaf.

From his morning argument with Alastair to the Great Break Room Disappointment of 2075, to the lunch incident you're about to read, Karl's objective for the day was simply to get a good cup of soykaf. Ultimately—as you'll see, loyal reader—it leads him to a very strange place indeed. For now, back to lunch.

One hour, that's all a drone gets for lunch. If they are lucky. While the strictness with which human resources tracks this hour varies from corporation to corporation, most frown upon taking a long lunch. That sort of thing is for executives, not drones. You are not likely to see a drone have a three-martini liquid lunch, but some gold-plated execs can get away with it.

One must understand the divide between the executive and drone class. As is the case with any other stratification or caste in society, there are unspoken rules when one tier deals with the other. While you, loyal reader, are not likely to ever meet an executive—a host of social barriers, and not a few bodyguards, ensure this—a drone very well may. Many hope to become executives one day, and corporate culture encourages this dream.

Yet for the vast majority of drones, a middle-management position is the top of the pyramid. Karl once aimed for more. Today, I don't think he even aims for management. His body is in the chair, but his soul is already out the door.

Which brings us back to lunch, the drone's only personal space in a twelve-hour day. If you aren't a drone, you need to realize that half of Karl's hours, waking or otherwise, are spent working for his corporation. When you break down the stats, more than half his life is devoted to the company.

Lunch is a brief redoubt. Today, Karl eschews the company cafeteria in search of a decent cup of soykaf.

- And the company cafeteria is a lot like twentieth century company stores. Back then, you had actual people going into mines instead of drones. Their wages wound up getting put right back into the company at these stores. They pay you, then you pay them. You never get ahead. Vicious.
- Dr. Spin

I ask him, can't he just get soykaf in the cafeteria?

"Yes, but it's terrible downstairs," he says as we wait at a crosswalk. The jaunty little digital man appears and does his walking dance. We cross. You can smell the salt air from the ocean, blown deep into the city by stiff winds this noon.

"I grew up on the ocean," Karl says unprompted. "Little island. My father was an artist. Successful with a certain set. Mom was ... well, anyway, I grew up smelling air like this.

Karl's mother walked into the Pacific one day and drowned. Research indicates suicide, but Karl's father had enough connections with influential people that the official cause was ruled as "accidental." When I asked about his mother further, Karl shut down.

"Kaf. The best. This way, little place I know."

TOP TEN STREAMED TRIDS OF THE 2070S BY DRONES

1. *Ork and Trudie* (Rom-com action thriller), 2070
2. *They Called Him Hierophant* (Shadowrunner melodrama), 2074
3. *Cenozoic Park* (Re-reboot), 2068
4. *Operation: Atlantis!* (Archaeological spy-fi), 2057
5. *Battle Royal* (Cross-licensed characters from top animated films battle for their lives on a secret island), 2070
6. *Stuffer Shack Days* (Indie comedy about an ork and elf clerk working for a living while making sarcastic observations), 2068
7. *Slade the Sniper: Killshots* (Re-reboot/sequel to the popular series), 2075
8. *Office Space* (Office comedy), 2075
9. *Seelies* (Family animated drama in the Seelie Court), 2074
10. *Auditing the Megacorps* (Documentary), 2075

The "little place" he knows is located inside one of Puyallup's squatter camps. While corporations invested in the neighborhood in the early 2050s, the squatter camps remain curiously unprivatized. A shantytown of corrugated iron roofs heaps against the black rhomboid of Mt. Rainier in the background.

Karl moves with confidence through the camp, simultaneously acknowledging yet ignoring the SINless. He takes me by the hand and steers me through the wanting crowd. Hooded eyes, furtive glances in our direction—it's clear we don't belong, and yet the squatters do a good business with the drone set.

We wind up in a short queue at a rattle-trap kaf stall carved out of the partial carcass of an old Greyhound bus.

"Best soykaf in the city," Karl says. "This is actually an indie biz. Those so-called 'indies' you see elsewhere, they're corporate fronts. You want real, salt-of-the-earth kaf, you come here."

You only come here, of course, if you have enough time to travel to a Puyallup squatter camp during work hours, but Karl seems willing to make the needed time commitment.

The brass machine that makes the soykaf looks like something out of a steampunk trideo. It chugs and vibrates with all the gusto of an old train, as the near-black tar comes out in heavy, viscous loops. Paper cups are the choice here. I see some littered around the front of the stall that are already self-degrading.

Karl sips his hot kaf and smiles, though not at me.

"You're happy here?" I ask.

"How do you mean?"

"I haven't seen you smile all day, except for a moment in the conference room. You weren't watching Singh."

He smiles again, "Optimizing my *Awakening: 1949* character." His smile turns to a scowl, and he asks why I mentioned his being happy here.

"Just an observation," I tell him. A reporter should not influence the subject of their profile, after all.

"Drek, I don't have time for a real lunch." Karl's wired on the homemade soykaf, and his pace is double-timing it back to the office. He points toward a Stuffer Shack across the street, and we go inside.

Here, back in the comfortable familiarity of the relentlessly branded, Karl's ghetto smile is several kilometers away. He picks the portable lunch aisle and scoops up a "POWR-Lunch" package to nuke back at the office. I don't follow. I stop in my tracks at the door.

That's because the Stuffer Shack is in the process of being robbed.

Two men wear the latex faces of trid stars from two decades ago. The troll holds a Remington Roomsweeper in a balled up fist and points it my way. I could crawl down the barrel. It's *that* big.

"Inside." He turns to Karl, who only now realizes the situation. "You, necktie, where I can see you by the lady."

SLUMMING DRONES

Drones and squatters seem like an unlikely mix, but there is a logical reason for drones to frequent the camps—independent businesses. It's an open secret that independent businesses exist largely under various corporate umbrellas. The corporations do not rebrand them precisely because people patronize these little shops, food vans and carts because they are not openly tied to a corporation.

While everyone knows most of them are really corporate owned, one can never be sure which are not. This lends a certain charm to places that would otherwise be part of a large chain.

Corp drones often look for something safely edgy, and the squatter communities serve this need. Drones don't really belong here, and the threat of violence hangs in the air, at least ostensibly. This is "slumming it," drone style.

In truth, the camps are policed by various security agencies and are relatively safe. The really dangerous places, like combat zones and DMZs, don't offer soykaf, and none of their business is done in the open.

Squatter camps provide a good, neutral location to meet a drone. Corporate presence is near non-existent and Lone Star, Knight Errant and their competition are used to seeing drones mingle with the non-traditional fashion victims seen in the camps. Runners fit right in.

Karl walks slowly over to me, arms in the air, right hand still carrying his POWR-Lunch. He isn't quivering like on the train this morning; instead, he projects an eerie calm. His face is like that of the hero in a trid, really, and I wonder if a scene like that plays through Karl's mind. *Please, don't do anything stupid*, I think. Hell, I wrote the article two weeks ago about the corp drone who tried to go Slade the Sniper during an office shooting. I made one of my many trips to the morgue for that story.

He isn't tense this time. The usual look on his face has gone suddenly cold, like how a sociopath might look if they thought you weren't watching. It's the first time in the day I don't feel sorry for Karl. I cannot say what I feel. Fear maybe.

"You going to play hero, drone?" the troll asks, reading him. The smaller man is ordering the Stuffer Shack clerk to sit still while they loot the consumer electronics aisle.

"And this too," the smaller man says, shoving the entire display of Mitsuhama's Kobe-Klone Beef Jerky at the clerk, who puts it in the bag.

Karl isn't here; I see that now. I don't know where he is. Maybe in a game.

THE SECRET CRIMINAL LIFE OF DRONES

Related to VITAS is an as-yet-unnamed "syndrome" in which citizens attempt to intervene in dangerous situations. Despite Knight Errant's contract with the city, robberies like the one at the Stuffer Shack are not rare (especially because Stuffer Shacks in middle- and lower-class neighborhoods are not top KE priorities).

A life of trids and games glamorizing the common man's reaction to situations like this gave birth to what the press named "Mitty Events." These are moments when an average Joe, usually with corp ties, confuses trids for reality and tries to play the hero. These events invariably end tragically.

Psychologists have ascribed these failed interventions to the pent-up anger and frustration of the closely proscribed life of the drone and those like her. Lives spent in rigid conformity, the theory argues, lend themselves to moments of sheer impulsiveness. Backed by a media myth of the lone hero, and under terrible amounts of fight-or-flight adrenaline, the individual snaps and tries to stop the violent act.

Twelve people died in Seattle alone last year trying to play the hero.

- It's true, but what they don't tell you is it's also a reason a drone will work with a runner like me. Some of them want the lives we have. They have wet dreams about running the shadows with an H&K, wired reflexes, and personal combat programs assessing a situation and selecting target vectors. Thing is, they don't have wired reflexes and the only H&K they ever shot was in Run, Run, Runner.

  That's delusional, but it's a delusion we can use, you know? Give someone a chance to live out a fantasy like this, even a little, and you'd be surprised how quick they fall in with the darker side of the street.

  Don't ever, never, bring one on an actual run though.
- Pistons

SEEPAGE

Seepage is a particularly 2070s phenomenon related to various psychological interactions with any number of better-than-life chips. In this case, elements of the assumed personality "seep" into the user's psyche. This creates a schizoid state which, under high-pressure circumstances, can cause the fake persona to manifest over the natural psyche of the user.

The event is disorienting and alienating, but rarely dangerous. Only 0.01 percent of those who experience seepage react in a violent manner. The "Slade the Sniper" murders of the mid 2060s are an overused example of such rare events. However, the publicity afforded that and other incidents causes the public to believe they are far more common.

At the Stuffer Shack, Karl experienced an incident of seepage. The character he plays in Awakening: 1948 is a grizzled American GI fighting in an alternate World War Two. The character is inured to combat and has a cold—almost sociopathic—psychology.

The game is immensely popular, and rival studios have accused Parity Control Studios of incorporating BTL technology in the game to cause addiction. This has yet to be proven.

CAUSES OF DISCONTENT

If Karl, right next to me, is about to lose his head, let's take a minute to explore why. After all, if we look at the whole of humanity throughout the history of the world, he has a standard of living that the majority of people who have lived would envy. He has entertainment options that are infinite and amazing. He is sheltered and fed. So why is he not happy? Why would he have so much discontent with his life that he might put everything he has at risk? Glad you asked. Here is a list of some common sources of discontent and ways operatives can use them to their advantage. Note to runners: It is no accident that rival corporations use the same list as these when getting a rival corp's employees to defect. You may very well run up against a corporate agent while trying to turn someone in another company. Corporate espionage is nothing if not Byzantine.

STAGNANT CAREER

A drone's career is often the very *elan vital* of their world. While it might be hard for a shadowrunner to understand, these folk live to move up the corporate ladder. When their upward mobility stalls, they become restless.

In a case such as this, the best route for a runner is to offer defection. Assuming the runner works for a rival corporation, they might be able to negotiate a better position for the drone in the new corporation. Of course, any corporation accepting a defector keeps a close eye on them afterwards, but that isn't your problem, is it, chummer?

MONEY

Drones have money issues like everyone else. They take out too much credit, they live beyond their means and they long for the kind of money their executives enjoy.

A smart runner can smell greed on anyone streetside, and drones are no different. This is straight-up bribery, as the runner offers money in exchange for information or services. This can be a temporary or permanent arrangement.

ADDICTION

Are drones less prone to addiction than the SINless, or do they just hide it better? BTL chips, old street drugs, gambling, bizarre sexual practices—drones have self-destructive proclivities the same as the rest of us.

Exploiting these is often easy. The drone might need a fix, be in debt to a Seoulpa Ring, or in trouble with Lone Star. If the runner can make these problems go away, they have the fish on the hook. Hey, it might not be moral to manipulate someone's illness, but then again, you didn't sign up for a career in ethics, did you?

FAMILY

We all have one. Many of us don't get along with them, but there's little we wouldn't do to help them. Drones have families too (incidentally, Drones Have Families 2 was a short-lived political movement in the 2050s seeking corporations to provide benefits to extended families of employees). A runner can get the skinny on a drone's family on the street or in the Matrix.

Given a big enough family, there's always something there to exploit. Just find that thing and lean on it, hard. Sure, you wouldn't like it if someone did it to you, but you're smart enough to live off the grid.

KARL: STATUS CHECK

So back to the Stuffer Shack. Karl has that look in his eye, but he doesn't crack, and I find myself taking a deep breath as he retains control. He remains calm, somehow. After his disappearance, further background research indicated that Karl has the psych profile of a soldier. He was very misfiled indeed.

Two bodies cool on the pavement outside Stuffer Shack, taken down by Knight Errant who came pretty quick and acted without much hesitation. They are holding us for questioning. Whatever seepage Karl experienced inside is gone, replaced by a panic no video game character would ever feel: the panic of once again being late.

KE gives Karl an excuse for work and, he hopes their stature in the corporate world will pull enough weight with Albright. As soon as Karl and I finish giving our statements, he bolts across the street and throws himself in front of a cab. The cab stops, we pile in and Karl shouts the address of the office, jamming his credstick into the battered aluminum slot. "Fast! Fast!"

It's not fast enough, but it turns out that doesn't matter.

THE AFTERNOON

Karl has his first luck of the day when we return to work and discover Albright is conferring with two people in her office. They look like corporate security, and she doesn't look her usual, cocky self.

Karl settles into his self-articulating chair and brings up a display, shuttling through a list of client names—his clients. Each salesperson here is responsible for their own clients. As Karl is swiping through the visualized spreadsheets—looking something like candy-colored written music to this outsider—a large, vaguely mouse-like head appears. The animated character is the sales AI for the department. His official name is Victory, but the staff calls him Mr. Dob. There's a memo about that on the breakroom fridge, by the way, saying how you aren't supposed to call him Mr. Dob, because Mitsuhama owns the trademark.

"Hey, there, pardner," Victory says. "Seems one of your clients is thinking of leaving us for Garden Grow. Gosh, I feel just awful bad about that. Time to give him

DRONE HANDLING

Manipulating a corp drone, or turning them into a permanent asset, is not always an easy thing. In so doing, a runner asks them to abandon all the comforts of corporate life the drone turned their back upon. Any runner hoping to use one has to understand where the drone is coming from.

The drone has a guaranteed life. It may not be the sort of life that the shadows offer, but it is often a life they are comfortable with, if not fond of. That is why many of the suggestions focus on drones evidencing dissatisfaction with the system. This should not be confused with complaining. All drones complain. It is part and parcel of being a drone (or even a human), but that does not mean they want out.

A runner has to work hard to get a drone to turn against their corporate master. The more data the runner can gather on the subject, the better chance of turning them. Whether the drone is a one-time benefit or a permanent asset, shadowrunners must approach each individually.

This is antithetical to the stereotype of the drone (after all, they are called drones for a reason). Yet each is an individual, as our piece on Karl shows. Karl is someone looking for a bigger life, one with excitement, even if he hasn't vocalized it to himself yet. Add his slipping performance, and Karl is ripe for use as an asset.

SPY DRONES

Double and triple agents aren't the first thing that comes to mind when seeking out a drone to leverage, but that doesn't mean they don't exist. More than one shadowrunner believed they manipulated a hapless drone only to find they were either a plant for the corporation or, even worse, an operative for a rival corporation. The manipulator can become the manipulated all too quickly—in and out of the shadows.

TOP TEN TRIDEO SHOWS DEMOGRAPHIC: DRONES 2077

1. *Half-Life with Steve* (Post-apocalypse toxic sprit thriller)
2. *What Would You Do for 100,000,000 Nuyen?* (Game show)
3. *Executive Dragons* (Reality show competition)
4. *Slade the Sniper* (Action—a UCAS combat vet takes to the mean streets of Seattle)
5. *STAT!* (Footage of real DocWagon calls)
6. *Ghost Dancers* (Historical action-drama set on an Arizona reservation just after the Awakening)
7. *My Metahuman Life* (High school melodrama about coming of age as an ork)
8. *20,000 Leagues to R'lyeh* (Lovecraftian submarine horror)
9. *MACMMA Live! Metahuman and Cybernetic Mixed Magical Arts* (MACMMA features top metahuman, enhanced and magically adept fighters squaring off inside the hermetic circle)
10. *The Mage* (Reality show—aspiring amateurs vie for a top wagemage slot at Renraku)

a call, right, Karl?" Mr. Dob is relentlessly chipper, like an AI life coach that only reads self-help books.

Dob goes ahead and dials for Karl who has to grab his virtual glasses. He hands me a pair the company provided to allow me to sit in.

The office blurs, then melts away, a trick like a candle burning down inflected with pixel rot. From the corners of our vision, a Texas ranch falls into place. A large man mends a barbed fence with bailing wire. He wears an actual cowboy hat. He turns toward us, wiping his brow. His face is ruddy, like someone who gets too much sun but never tans, and his white hair is neatly trimmed.

"Howdy, there, Karl. Who's your friend?"

Genetically re-engineered bison roam the scrub behind the man. The Texas sky goes on forever, a blue rarely seen in Seattle.

"She's a reporter. Anything you don't want on the record, tell her. Or don't say it."

He dusts his hands off on jeans so bleached they've gone cornflower blue. "I have nothing to hide." He tips his hat toward me. "Ma'am."

"You thinking about leaving us for Garden Grow, Cartweiss?"

The older man squints at the sun. "Those AIs of yours sure do keep you informed."

"That they do. Is it true?"

"Gotta think of business. You got yourself bought by a AAA. I don't expect I'll get the same rates."

"Anderson, we're the only one that has the rembryo growth formula. You want your chickens on the table a week after they hatch, who else you gonna call?"

Anderson Cartweiss pauses, jaw set firmly. "Thing is, Karl, I hear Great American maybe got that illegally. Maybe your new owners want to stop the sale of that."

"Where did you hear that?" Karl doesn't miss a beat, but I note a microexpression of surprise. This is the first he's heard of it.

"A little birdie told me."

"We aren't going anywhere, Karl."

Their conversation continues like this for some time, until Karl at last convinces his client to stay on with the

company. When we drop our glasses, the bland office, lacking natural sunlight, pours in.

"Son of a bitch," Karl says more in surprise than anger.

I ask him if he thinks that Cartweiss is right.

"I don't know. I need to look at some things. You should go get a coffee or something."

I lean over his computer and him, my hair brushing his shoulder. "Machine is broke, remember? Besides, full access. You agreed."

He moves his head around my hair. "Fine."

It's an hour and half later. Karen Albright appears in front of Karl's cubicle. Her face is a pale mask, all the color drawn out. Maybe the corporate security goons are vampires.

"What have you been doing all afternoon? You logged one sales call." She's trying on her habitual anger with Karl, using it as a crutch to prop her back up.

"I managed to keep Anderson Cartwiess from leaving for a competitor. He's a big account. You ought to be pleased."

"That's your job, Karl. Don't expect praise for doing what we pay you for." She looks quickly back at her office. I see her right hand, which she keeps behind her back, shaking. "Whatever it is you're doing can wait. I need you to compile a list of all your clients that buy more than one thousand units of rembryos each month."

"AI can do that."

Albright doesn't like that answer. "I'm telling you to do it." Her voice carries less anger than panic. "Get it done."

"Why?"

"You don't ask me questions, Karl," her voice so loud and sudden that the entire cubicle farmstead looks at her. She tries to comport herself, spins on one heel, and heads back to her office. The two men are still sitting there, looking dour and serious as a sadcore troubadour.

Karl rolls his head around his neck like a bobble toy. He sighs again, deep and long and redolent with defeat.

I ask if it's unusual for a salesperson to compile these lists.

"Very. No reason to use organic labor on it."

Is she punishing him? She seemed almost afraid. He eyes the pair in Albright's office. One sits down behind her desk just as Albright turns the window opaque with a swipe of her hand.

Karl gets to work.

Another hour in, a man in black pants with creases like knives and a shirt so white it hurts to look at comes in frantically.

"Mr. Rodriguez?" Karl asks.

"Karl, I need ... I need a list of all your clients who buy more than a thousand units of—"

"Rembryos a month?" Karl finishes for him.

"Yeah, how did you know?"

"Albright already asked for it."

TOP TEN VACATION SPOTS (VIRTUAL) FOR DRONES 2075

1. Mars
2. Atlantis
3. London
4. Saigon
5. Vladivostok Cold War Theme Park
6. FuchiLand
7. The Year 1985
8. Bimini
9. Paris
10. Mexico City

"Karen did?" Rodriguez is more anxious now. "Send me a copy. Direct. No sense in bothering her with an extra."

"I could just attach it and copy you in the mail."

"No!" Rodriguez appears surprised that he shouted. He lowers his voice. "No, just send it to me direct." The office, once again, is staring at us.

"Sure, it's wiz."

Rodriguez eyes the darkened windows of Albright's office before he leaves.

Curiouser and curiouser.

CLOCKING OUT

"We're all going to Wang Chung's, you want to come?" Alex's eyes are bright and cheerful and almost pleading.

"I need to get some kaf," Karl says.

"They have it there."

George joins us along with Dotty and a few others. "Yeah, Karl, you should come."

"Maybe tomorrow night."

"Sunday," Amy says sadly. "We're off."

"I'm sorry, I just can't." They take the elevator down by themselves. Albright locks her office behind her with her handprint. She stops briefly at Karl's desk. "Working late to make up for your tardiness?" she asks, but her heart isn't in it.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Leave it on my desktop when you're done, Karl." She walks on without saying goodbye. Her gait is not the self-assured march I've previously seen. Karl watches her. When the elevator doors close behind her, he calls up Dob, whose eyes are closed, head bobbing slightly as if in sleep.

"Dob. Wake up." The eyes snap open like on springs. Dob is very suddenly awake and alert.

"Hey, Karl. Still working on that report? Nope, I see it's done. Why are we working late?"

"Have any requests for rembryo data today besides me?"

SYNCING WITH THE GRID

Another aspect of drone life is tracking. By analyzing Karl's behavioral patterns, the stairs in the metro recognize which train he likely wants to take. This convenience applies all over the city, which means a talented decker can take advantage of the information. People leave a trail as they travel, marks in the Matrix that don't stay around long but still may leave faint traces—information about what ads were activated, what databases were accessed, that sort of thing. If you know who you are looking for, follow the trail of what was activating and see if it matches the profile of the person you are looking for. On the train, the decker could search for the channel and ad package most like Karl's profile. Of course, the decker needs that profile. Piece by piece, the decker builds enough of her own profile on Karl that she can spot similar patterns in the vast floes of data creeping across the Matrix every second—icebergs on permanent fast forward.

From there, she could run Karl's pic—as seen on his employee ID—through a facial recognition program to further track him. This, however, requires access to one of the security firm's networks. That's a dangerous hack. Much easier to see when Karl gets home, as his building logs that. Or, our decker might look for his specific "Have it your way" order at a fast-food joint in the area. Because drones are on the grid, and because their profiles are very specific to them, deckers can circumvent some of the more difficult ways of tracking people in a given city. Why go up against black IC when you can stealth your way into a cashier app at Mongo's Donut World?

All of these tags are a convenience to Karl, a passive part of his world he hardly thinks about. For a runner, though, it's a gaping hole in his personal security. One man's triple layer UCAS syrup bear claw is a decker's pulsing tracking symbol, begging to be leveraged.

"Let me put my thinking cap on, Karl!" A nanosecond passes. "Four," Dob says, "two internally from this location and two from our London branch!" He says London like he's announcing Karl has just won the city lottery.

Karl's interested is piqued. It's the first time I've seen this happen all day. Gears move behind his eyes, and I ask him what he's doing. He tells me the day is over. I should go home.

"A day in your life is twenty-four hours. I still have ten-plus to go." My hair, again, brushing his shoulder as I lean toward Dob.

"Fine, you can watch me play 1949 at home." He gets up, puts on his jacket to leave.

"Okay. Okay. Whatever you do is off the record so long as we both shall live."

"Journalistic integrity?" He doesn't sound convinced.

"I promise." And I would have kept that promise, too, if Karl hadn't disappeared. If he hadn't disappeared, dear reader, you wouldn't be reading this part.

"Dob, who requested the data?"

"Let me loo—" but Dob momentarily de-rezzes. His face goes slack, like a digital stroke. It doesn't last more than ten seconds, then he's back. "I'm sorry, Karl. I seem to have forgotten what we were talking about. How can I help?"

"What the hell happened to Dob?" I ask.

To me: "Never mind." To the big floating head: "Dob. I'll see you on Monday." Karl takes my elbow and pulls me toward the elevator.

I remind him we had an agreement. He nods. "We'll talk about it outside."

AN EVENING OUT

Karl keeps shushing me until we're out of the corporate park and headed toward the subway. My mind is alight with questions, like a game show board before the first buzz in. What was it that happened to Dob? Why is Karl interested in the multiple requests for data on an item that, to me, is pretty mundane? This is the real investigative work.

Down the concrete metro steps, each one lighting with bioluminescent ideograms directing people toward their trains. The stairs *know* where Karl wants to go.

Aboard the train, Karl finally opens up. The data is mundane, and he doesn't know why everyone would want it unless it signals a closure of his department. Even then, why get so excited over it?

"If they were going to close us down, they'd strip our department for the things they don't already sell. This would be the first step in making us redundant. Then they'd give our unique products, like rembryos, to one of their people. Dammit, I'm going to be out of a job." He looks worried, genuinely, and I have to remind myself that this is his life but just my assignment. Don't get too close to your subject, dear aspiring journalists.

"What about Dob," I say. "Why did he go slack like that?"

He works his jaw, thinking. "Someone was accessing him." You can almost see the light bulb over his head, like in those old cartoons. "But he went down for few seconds. Drek, it was someone outside doing it. A decker!" The excitement is palpable.

I don't have time to ponder that, because Karl drags

DRONE TYPES

Puget Sounds! gathered a considerable amount of data to compile the following profiles. All data comes from the years 2066-2075.

THE MAVEN

This drone is the gossip of the office. Usually specializing in one particular, and generally technical, field, the Maven knows all there is to know about their area of expertise and lets you know it. Mavens gravitate to administration work, where their attention to detail shines. Sometimes they rise to the position of department manager, but more often top out as assistant manager. Managing people is not at the top of their skillset.

Dotty Port embodies this drone archetype.

- You want to manipulate a Maven, give them gossip way better than what they find at work, kids. We're all runners here, privy to secrets that blow anything Dave in Accounting did out of the water. Make a Maven feel like A) you need their expertise and B) you're letting them in on delicious secrets, and they're yours.
- Dr. Spin

THE LADDER CLIMBER

Naked ambition is the hallmark of the Ladder Climber. They see drone life as the first step on their way to the top. Some of them even succeed.

Ladder Climbers know you have to step on people to get to the apex of the corporate pyramid. They generally have few qualms about this. Morality doesn't get you a promotion.

Karen Albright is a classic Ladder Climber.

THE BURN OUT

He's worked for the corporation for at least ten years and may have started as a Bright Young Thing, but it's been awhile since he felt that way. He may loathe drone life or merely feel dissatisfaction. Burn Outs are either looking for a new position at another corporation or reevaluating their lives.

Unsurprisingly, Karl Denisovich typifies the Burn Out.

THE BRIGHT YOUNG THING

She's fresh out of school, full of spunk and cheerful. The Bright Young Thing probably even believes in the good intentions of the corporation. She's potentially ambitious but still a team player. She hasn't worked for the corporation for more than a few years.

Alex Kim is a Bright Young Thing.

- Innocence is what a runner doesn't have and a Bright Young Thing does. Their gullibility is your biggest asset.
- Dr. Spin

THE ELDER STATESMAN

He's worked for the corporation for twenty or more years. In that time, he's seen it all. He is in it for the long haul and looking forward to retirement. The company has been relatively good to him, and while he isn't a gung-ho company booster, he knows on which side his bread is buttered.

Elder Statesmen make good managers and, very occasionally they become executives.

- Better have a compelling reason for this type to turn. Either that, or you better have blackmail. The Elder Statesman worked all his life to get to retirement.
- Dr. Spin

me off at the next stop "You aren't anywhere near home," I say.

He changed his mind. Going out to the club to meet his coworkers is a good idea. "Recon," he says, no doubt trying to sound like one of his games.

Wang Chung's is the way a club looks in flatscreen movies from last century—all chrome and mirrors trying too hard to evoke that forgotten era. The music, my phone tells me, is likewise of the era—New Order, Joy Division Michael Jackson, names invoked from a past no one here ever lived in.

George, Alex, Dotty and the rest of the department, excluding Albright, sit at a high cocktail round. Alex dances to a beat composed more than a century before she was born. My phone keeps flashing info about each song, but I shut it off.

Karl orders a drink. Alex makes eyes at him. As expected, everyone is complaining about work. The gang is a fair representation of drone archetypes.If you want a non-pharmacological soporific, listen to a group of drones whine about work for a couple of hours. The corpspeak is so thick I'm starting to think "outside the box" and wonder what my "value added" might be.

While listening to the inane conversation, I see Karl's salesman come out. Maneuvering the conversation, he picks everyone's brains trying to figure out if they are all about to be fired.

George saw all this before. Every time there's a merger or buyout or the forecast calls for rain, every drone swears the sun won't rise the next morning. It always does.

Dotty heard from someone in shipping has connections to the Comanche Mafia and highlights certain bar codes before they go out. Karl takes particular note of that.

Alex moons over Karl all night. She's sure everything will work out. She slides ever closer to Karl over the course of the evening, but he's mired in his fear of termination. I wonder if Karl really enjoys any moments in his life.

It's an existential conundrum a lot of drones face. They work seventy hours a week for a lifestyle propped up by means of escaping that exact life—trids, games, sports, BTLs.

Karl smiles politely, pays for Alex's drinks, and says he needs to get home.

We cab it back to his building where he says goodnight and tells me it's been pleasant, but I remind him the bottle imp still has him through the wee hours and let the cab take me back home where a looking-glass awaits.

First thing Karl does is get into a t-shirt and sweat pants. He paces around the apartment with a beer in hand, and I assume he's rolling over the collected data from the day or, as he called it, "intel."

Eventually, he grabs another beer, plops on the couch, and applies his game goggles and haptics. He jacks in, and it takes me a few minutes to figure out his seemingly pointless hand gestures are him loading the game.

Soon enough, he's talking to his team—other players, also sitting half naked on their couches or futons, pretending their lives are interesting. I glean that they are in Paris during a battle to retake the city from the Germans. Karl (or, technically, his character in game) is tasked with saving a group of ork rangers who had the misfortune of being toasted by a dragon—air support.

Karl's hands hold an invisible gun. "Take that, Jerry," he shouts, while mowing down what I can only imagine are SS trolls. Then he jerks violently, the haptics sending faux pain signals to his brain. He's been shot, but he keeps going. It's boring to watch someone else play a game—they simply look like a crazy person talking to imaginary friends and shooting imaginary enemies.

I'm about to get myself a beer when Karl sits bolt upright. "Who the hell are you? You aren't in the game?" he says. Clearly, something has changed.

"Yes it is. It's most definitely a game." Pause. "What do you mean it doesn't have to be?"

"Yeah, the bottle imp I— Hey, how do you know that? Are you spying on me?"

Then a voice fills the apartment, no longer in game. It starts as Alastair but quickly becomes that of a tinny, old-time vinyl record centuries gone. Eerie, but that's what the speaker is going for. "So, Karl," the not-voice says, "How would you like to be a shadowrunner for real?"

The scrying glass goes dark as a magical ward cuts my access. Professional, but for a few seconds I can still hear the not-voice. "Well, Karl," it says, "You ready to start living?"

Karl disappeared that night. I checked for him at his building. According to the building AI, he never lived there. His corporation has no record of him either—at least that's what they told me when I called. I ask for Karen Albright but am told, "She is no longer with the company."

I try the rest of the department, but Alex is the only one who will talk to me. She whispers, as if she believes speaking quietly enough will foil the bugs. "I got a message from him this morning. Text only, right across my feed at home. How could he get into my feed? He said he was okay. He said his was running the shadows. Oh, drek. New boss is here. I have to go. Please find him?" She hangs up.

Running the shadows, dear reader. Time for your faithful reporter to go deeper. Wish me good karma; there be dragon out there.

Your faithful reporter, Rhonda Ehnds, reporting from somewhere near the edge.

TOP TEN VIDEO GAMES FOR DRONES, 2077

1. *Run, Run Runner* (Shadowrunning MMO)
2. *Astral Dreams: Legend of Tenku* (Mitsuhama RPG)
3. *The Seelie Court* (MMO in alternate dimension)
4. *Galaxy Ten* (Real-time strategy and civilization building)
5. *Awakening: 1949* (Alt WWII setting where Awakening happened in 1937)
6. *Noir Confidential* (Action RPG set in a rebuilt, retro future Los Angeles)
7. *Fermat's Last Hermetic Equation* (Mobile puzzle game)
8. *Miracle Shooter* (AR combat)
9. *Beat The Market* (Zurich Orbital trade sim)
10. *Life's A Bitch* (Life management sim where goal is driving your sim family insane)

COURTING DISASTER

The mouse does not have to conquer the elephant. The mouse doesn't even need to get close enough for the elephant to be able to touch it. The mouse just has to make sure it is seen.

Groovetooth sat in the back seat of a Ford Americar, idly picking at fraying upholstery. Esme wouldn't mind—this car was destined for the dump the second this mission was over. She had an ARO in front of her with the Corporate Court memo style in front of her. She looked at that, then she looked at the memo she had drafted. It looked right. It sounded right. It just needed to get in front of the right eyes.

And that was the trick. If a memo like this hit the Corporate Court's internal systems with any hint of external origin, it would be deleted immediately, before anyone saw it. It would vanish without having any effect on the world.

Esme stopped three blocks from the towers. If the vehicle didn't move for more than fifteen seconds without a red light or stop sign affecting it, a traffic ticket would automatically be issued. The cost wouldn't be a problem—NYPD Inc. would have considerable difficulty finding the registered driver of the vehicle, one "Stella Grabowski," whose identity would vanish with the car. The bigger problem was that the ticket would be a record, an electronic trail, a piece of evidence, no matter how scant. Something pros did not leave behind.

Groovetooth was out of the car and had the door closed in eight seconds.

She walked quickly, glancing repeatedly at the towers looking nearby. She covered three blocks, reached the front doors, and walked by them. The scanners, astral overwatch, armed security, and more at those doors made it the wrong place to go if you were not welcome. But the front door was the wrong place for shadowrunners anyway.

She went to the next block down, past another building, then into a drug store. People milled about, looking for quick uppers to get them through the next six hours of their day, or buying immune system boosters in response to the rumors about new superbugs spreading through the city. Groovetooth was dressed simply, white blouse and skirt, and she blended in easily. She slipped through a door to the back room of the store, and suddenly she was broadcasting the ID of a corporate employee for the chain. No one would question her—in fact, most employees back there would try to avoid her. She walked briskly past the loading dock, then dropped behind a stack of pallets that appeared to be a permanent fixture.

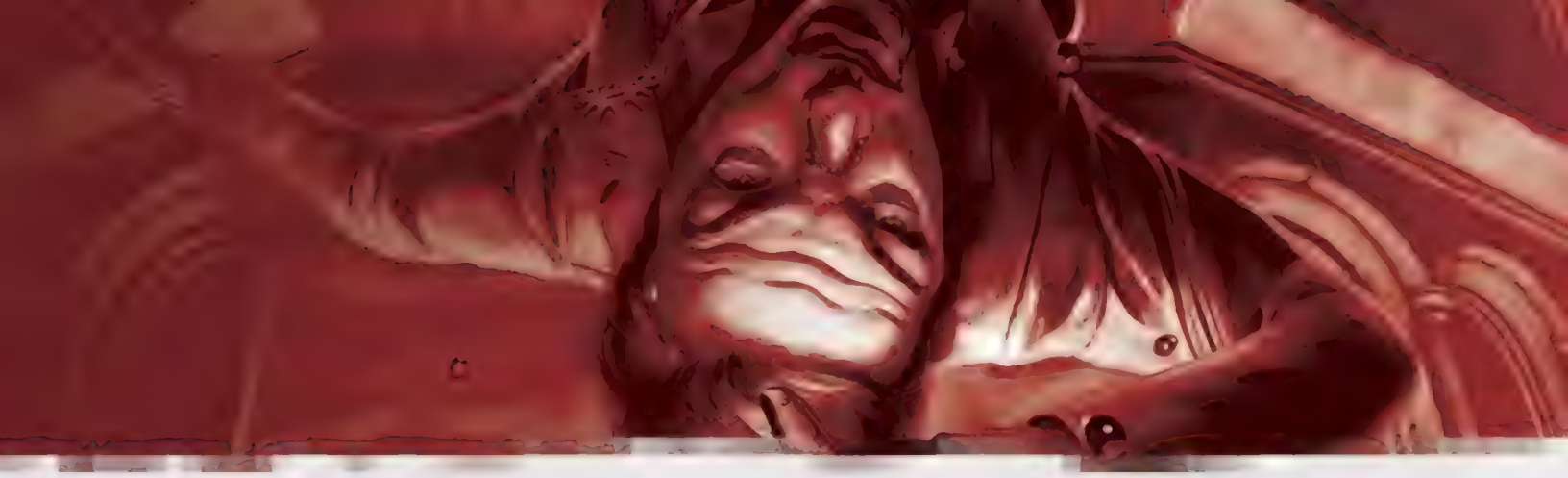
The timing was perfect. As she squatted down, a small drone crawled out of a hole in the floor that it had spent days digging. Behind it was a cord. If all went well, that cord was currently part of the Corporate Court network.

She wasted no time. She plugged in and sent the message. The memo would go out. It was simple.

Reports say that Celedyr will reject Spinrad's offer to jump ship–if Villiers will share JRJ ownership with him. The dragon is approaching a minefield; CC responses will be needed. Preparations should start immediately.

The memo was unsigned. Its legitimacy would be questioned immediately. But it would be read, and it would start thought processes moving in certain directions.

The mouse would be seen.



REAPING THE WHIRLWIND

POSTED BY: COSMO

Since it was first founded back in '23, the Corporate Court has dreamed about being a major power of the Sixth World. Sure, it's got the strength of the most powerful corporations in the world backing it, so it has the ability to bring its edicts into reality and to make people quake in fear of its rulings, but wielding that second-hand power is a mixed blessing—there's a lot of it, but you always feel like you're playing with someone else's toys, and at any point that someone else could just take them back, leaving you with nothing.

For the most part, the justices of the Corporate Court were able to live with this arrangement. After all, they tend to be selected for their loyalty to their parent corp, so in theory they're not going to be displeased that they are wielding power on behalf of the corp. But you have to remember, these are powerful people—you don't select some low-level, low-ambition nobody as a Corporate Court justice. These are capable, dynamic, high-level folks, which means sometimes their smarts, ability, and ambition eclipse their loyalty. And they start thinking about ways that the Corporate Court can be its own power, shining its own light instead of borrowing others.

Which brings us to the Megacorporate Revision. Most people have properly understood it as a power play by the Big Ten to keep lower-level corps in line and quaking in their boots. It's Machiavelli 101—you can't force people to love, but you can force them to fear, so do it.

- Poor Machiavelli, always invoked, seldom understood. He advised against rapaciousness and the taking of things from your subjects. The megacorps can hardly be said to be genuinely following his advice.
- Fianchetto

The origins of the Megacorporate Revision, naturally enough, lie with the Big Ten, but the justices did not take long to see opportunity, grab it, and twist the procedure into something that can make them into what they have always dreamed of becoming.

But I am ahead of myself. Let's put the recent events in context, which means a brief review of some notable moments in Corporate Court history.

A HALF CENTURY OF JUDICIAL EXPEDIENCY

The Corporate Court was formed in 2023 for one simple reason: to keep the megacorporations from tearing each other apart in damaging wars. Now, this is not a terrible thing to do—recognizing you have a problem and attempting to do something about it is a sign of maturity. The corporate wars preceding the founding of the court were quite damaging, to the point where the unthinkable was happening—even the "winners" (such as could be determined in some of these slug-fests) were not able to increase their profits. In fact, in many cases every party involved lost significant sums of money, which is an abhorrent state of affairs to corporate titans. The purpose of the court was to turn the battles of grenades and bullets into the slightly less destructive conflict of lawyers and contracts. And, of course, shadowruns.

One important fact to remember about the original Corporate Court is that it had seven members: Ares, ORO, BMW, JRJ International, Keruba International, Mitsuhama, and Shiawase. This is important because those corporations have the so-called "golden ticket" to a court seat. As long as these corps exist in some form, they get a seat on the court. Ares, Mitsuhama, and Shiawase we all know; ORO evolved into Aztechnology, Keruba transformed into Renraku, BMW became part of Saeder-Krupp, and JRJ went wherever Richard Villiers went, making sure that whatever corp he built had AAA status.

- That last bit is going to be very important in coming months as court members ponder just what kind of punishment to level on NeoNET for the whole CFD affair. They can strip NeoNET of all sorts of assets, they can remove Villiers from his position, but as long as he holds that JRJ ownership, he'll have a presence on the court.

That circumstance is proving to be very vexing to the justices, as well as the corporate execs giving them their marching orders.

- Mr. Bonds

AZTECHNOLOGY CRISIS

The court toddled along for the next few decades, organizing corporate rankings, investigating various disputes, and helping fill the planetary quota of important people wearing long black robes. Then Aztlan went and nationalized all non-Aztechnology holdings in the nation in 2044, and a howl of protest rose across the world. The Corporate Court issued a whole series of stern pronouncements condemning Aztechnology's actions and telling them to stop.

Aztechnology did not stop.

This was the moment of truth for the Corporate Court. They had to show themselves as a true force to be reckoned with, a body that could make sure its edicts were followed and not just ignored. So they stepped up and initiated Operation: Reciprocity. Air strikes. Ground strikes. Drone strikes. Ares, Novatech, Mitsuhama, and Saeder-Krupp went full-bore against the Big A, with support from Renraku, Shiawase, and Yamatetsu. The blows were heavy and brought severe pain to Aztechnology. Eventually, the impossible happened: Aztechnology was humbled. They came to the negotiating table and eventually repaid the losses inflicted by Aztlan's seizure of property.

The test had been passed. The Corporate Court had shown that when needed, it could draw on the combined power of its members to give real force to its decisions.

- That is perhaps an overly optimistic assessment. Another way of looking at it would be to say that the members of the Corporate Court demonstrated that they are capable of taking extreme actions in unity when their self interest requires it.
- Mr. Bonds

Still, though, there was some hesitancy among Corporate Court justices and staff. They had demonstrated power, true, but it was still borrowed power. What could they do to demonstrate power of their own?

A socialite with too much time on her hands had the answer.

GOD OF THE NEW MATRIX

Crash 2.0 was a bad time for the Corporate Court. With the Novatech IPO being a prime motivator of the Crash and the subsequent dissolution of Cross Applied Technologies, the court looked slow, unprepared, and overwhelmed by the circumstances around them. The Matrix that emerged in the wake of the Crash was largely built in a spirit of "never again," as a primary factor on the minds of those building it was to avoid the structures that had allowed Crash 2.0 to happen. A decentralized, open Matrix would be hard to bring down, and having control over the Matrix distributed among millions of people would mean there were millions of eyes watching over it, maintaining it and preserving it from possible crises. The new Matrix may not have been as profitable as the old one, but it was safe and stable.

- The fact that the corps were willing to trade profit for stability tells you tons about how badly the Second Crash shook them.
- Sunshine

Then came the growing campaign of Danielle de la Mar, urging the corps in general, and the Corporate Court Matrix Authority and its Grid Overwatch Division in particular, to rule over the Matrix with a firmer hand, to prevent some of the excesses that are inevitable with a free and open Matrix. By the time de la Mar's campaign started gathering steam, Crash 2.0 was a decade in the past, so the fears that had developed in the wake of it had dissipated. The corps had become comfortable with the new Matrix, to the point where they were ready to mess with and manipulate it if it meant they would get what they want. In de la Mar, the corps saw a true "useful idiot," someone who could do the public work of attempting to push them to do something they were already inclined to do—rule over the Matrix with a firmer hand.

In 2075, the Matrix became much more controlled and centralized, and the organization responsible for providing the central control was the Grid Overwatch Division. Already powerful, GOD rose in stature as its agents became the feared demons of the internet, the predators who seemed to lurk everywhere. And as the people who held the leash of these predators, the Corporate Court grew in stature. Governing the Matrix had always been a nice source of power, but now they were actively brining pain to those who misuse the Matrix, and simply saying that maybe they could go easy on someone or another became an important sense of currency in the corporate world. The court had a piece of the power they always wanted.

Only to have new chaos throw their power into uncertainty.

A FAKE JUSTICE AND LOOMING HEAD CRASH

Around the same time that de la Mar was pushing to build a new Matrix, the early roots of what became the CFD scandal were taking root in the Corporate Court. As we have learned, the CFD virus was unleashed on the world by artificial intelligences who were subjected to experimentation related to the goal of making digital copies of biological people. An early experiment

in that direction was not strictly authorized by Evo's Dickens Program but grew out of it. A faction within Evo was looking to gain power by building internal and external alliances. They really wanted Corporate Court Justice Hino on their side, but she appeared resistant to their appeals—right up until the moment she wasn't. In 2074, Justice Hino started making decisions that were exactly in line with the desires of this faction, and that went a long way toward building up an alliance with Aztechnology. People started asking what was behind this change of heart, but as it turned out it was not so much about changing the Chief Justice's heart as it was eliminating it. The faction managed to replace the flesh-and-blood justice, whose corporeal had not been seen much anyway, with a digital version, a Matrix entity that was capable of speaking and acting like Justice Hino, but deciding the way Kirilenko wanted her to. The replacement Hino was persuasive enough to keep people on and off the court months, and it took the action of shadowrunners to uncover the plot.

- So did we ever discover just what kind of program this was? Was it just a detailed program? A true AI that they convinced to imitate Hino? Or an AI that truly believed it was the real Hino?
- Pistons

- It was an uploaded personality imprint of Hino that they then went in and altered according to their needs. Reprogramming an AI is much easier than messing with a human brain.
- Plan 9

- No it isn't. I'd ask you for a source, but I know you don't have one. It was a semi-sapient AI that they imprinted with enough characteristics of Justice Hino that it was able to pass, but it needed regular input from its handlers. Without it, it has been rather lost and purposeless, but it seems independent enough that those handlers have not been able to bring themselves to pull its plug. It still exists in a hidden corner of the Matrix, another shameful

testament to how little biological life thinks of its digital equivalent.

- Icarus

Once the plot was uncovered, though, things went quickly downhill. Part of the point of the conspiracy had been to squeeze out Buttercup, or at least reduce her power within Evo, but in the end they did just the opposite. Kirilenko's rep went in the shitter, and Buttercup played the situation for all she was worth, portraying the other faction as the forces of incompetence and bungling conspiracy, while she is the force for competence, focus, and doing things the right way.

- Keep in mind that from the corps' perspective, the "competence" part is way more important than the "dishonest" part. A job done poorly is a problem, while a job done well is fine whether it was done honestly or dishonestly.
- Dr. Spin

- Which is totally different from how shadowrunners work, right?
- Chainmaker

We have a posting on Evo that will deal in more detail with the fallout within the corp (and the total fall of Kirilenko); here, I want to talk about changes in the Court. First, and most obviously, there is much more security for justices participating in court affairs via Matrix icon. The very best in biometric scanning has been deployed to make sure that when a justice is participating via Matrix, their physical self is present and engaged. If the physical self moves, or even falls asleep, the connection to the Court is terminated.

- Some justices, namely the lazier Z-O Habitat-based ones, started working on finding a way around the new protocols as soon as they were introduced. The word I'm getting from the habitat is that they are having "intermittent success."
- Orbital DK

Beyond that, though, was more heat applied to the simmering resentment the justices sometimes feel about being used as pawns instead of powers in their own right. While the real Hino was not killed when she was replaced, she was put into cold storage, and the fate of her frozen body is not exactly clear. She at very least could not continue on the Court and was relieved of her duties. The justices felt (quite rightly) that this whole affair demonstrated little regard for them as people, and that the best counter to this problem was to build up their own power so that they could not be easily ignored or swept aside. Which leads us to ...

MEGACORPORATE REVISION

Like it or not, this was a genius move by the Corporate Court. By announcing that all AA- and A-rated corps were subject to having their status reviewed and possibly revoked, they created tremendous tension and uncertainty. First of all, they sold it perfectly. They went to the Big Ten CEOs and explained the benefits of creating uncertainty and fear among the ranks of the AA- and A-rated corps as follows: The smaller corps will be desperate to get on the good side of the AAAs—and if they don't feel they can get approval, they'll be more open to acquisition. On top of that, when they're not paying attention to the Big Ten, the little guys will be keeping each other busy, trying to expose their competitors as ones deserving a downgrade, or perhaps have another AA or A targeted for takeover so they can get do their own work while others are pre-occupied with merger work. The end result is that the lower-ranked corps will cause chaos with each other while trying to suck up to the AAAs. What's not to like?

By all evidence, the audit is working exactly as intended at this point. AG Chemie suffered a temporary downgrade to an A rating, and they responded with a flurry of favors paid to AAAs and shadowruns of their own that hurt some of their rivals while also exposing information that proved quite useful to the members of the Big Ten that managed to intercept the resulting intel. Meanwhile, other corps are exploring mergers, MCT is gobbling up desperate lower-level corps, and the shadows are bursting with sabotage jobs that could push some corps on the borderline of a downgrade right over the edge.

It's a great time to be a AAA, and perhaps an even better time to be a Corporate Court justice. Their docket these days is practically all Megacorporate Audit-related, as corps look for rulings that might help pre-empt a downgrade, or appeal a downgrade, or conduct business related to an impending nature. Naturally, everyone wants Corporate Court decisions to go their way, but the urgency is even greater now—which means tremendous opportunity for the justices.

Now, this is where we need to talk about how the pros use an opportunity like this. Your average street punk isn't good at approaching this situation with any sophistication, thinking only about the bribes justices must be able to collect in a situation like this. That's because your average street punk is stupid. Accepting direct bribes is the worst way to use power. It's too obvious, making you susceptible to blackmail from future shadowruns, and honestly it does not pay as well as subtler methods of payout. One of the simplest of these better methods is the logrolling favor—the justice (who, unless they are a moron, has accumulated a fine collection of stock in their time) makes a favorable decision to one corp, and that corp in the not-too-distant future

awards a sizable contract to one of the companies the justice has a share in, thereby pushing the price of the stock up, while also possibly putting a nice dividend in the justice's pockets.

- Wait, aren't justices supposed to put their stocks and other holdings in a blind trust of something, so that their decisions can be impartial?
- Chainmaker

- That's cute. First, they always have their parent corp affiliation that they wear right on their sleeve, and there's no disguising that. Second, while they make some vague notions at putting their financial affairs in the hands of someone else, those situations are never fully blind, or even at arm's length. The Corporate Court is not built on some notion of unbiased, equitable justice, so they are not held to the standards of civic judges.
- Sunshine

- In this day and age, government judges aren't held to that standard, either. No one is.
- Snopes

The games of power trading go beyond straight quid pro quo, too. You don't advance to the position of Corporate Court justice without being able to play a long-term game of power acquisition and manipulation (and yes, haters, I'm including Michele Borden in that assessment), and sometimes the decisions they make are for reasons that may not be clear. As an example, let's take a look at a case from 2075. Mitsubishi Motors sued Rolls-Royce, alleging that their latest model of the Phaeton violated several Mitsubishi patents. Often such matters might be relegated to civil courts, but Mitsubishi alleged the violations happened due to an ongoing espionage campaign, so they brought it to the Corporate Court. Court watchers, by habit, assume the Japanacorps will vote as a bloc unless their individual assets are involved, and they also assume they will usually side with a Japanese corp over a foreign corp. And true to fashion, Shiawase and Renraku justices sided with Mitsubishi. So did longtime MCT Justice Kosuke Shimizu. But the relative newcomer to the body, Mayumi Tsukino, sided with Rolls-Royce, joining both Ares justices, both S-K justices, and justices from Horizon and NeoNET, giving a seven to six decision to Rolls-Royce. This angered Mitsubishi incredibly, since they felt MCT had failed to control their justices to provide the decision they felt they deserved. The initial reaction from Mitsubishi was hostile, including several shadowruns, but as the Phaeton carved into Nightsky sales (and stock prices declined accordingly), Mitsubishi decided that their time might better be spent worrying about Rolls-Royce instead of MCT. At about that time, MCT Court Justice Tsukino crafted an advisory opinion describing new guidelines on what the Court would consider "actionable espionage activities" and what would be allowed as "customary competitive business practice. As it happens, behind-the-scenes negotiations of appeasement between MCT and Mitsubishi led to the latter corp receiving a draft of the opinion in advance, giving them time to get a leg up on putting their new "customary competitive business practices" into motion before anyone else. As this was under-the-table espionage-type stuff, the advanced word on the opinion did not immediately bring Mitsubishi stock prices back up, but it led to much friendlier relations with MCT. Then, not long afterward, the announcement of the Megacorporate Audit came through. With a somewhat depressed stock price, Mitsubishi was an attractive target for MCT, and the warmer relationship led to Mitsubishi being receptive to advances. So negotiations took place, money changed bank accounts, and Mitsubishi Motors joined the MCT portfolio. Would it have happened that way without the 2075 decision? Maybe. But not as smoothly.

- As an addendum, before his time as a CC justice, Tsukino did some work for and had connections at the Mitsuhama Financial Group. The group bought several thousand shares of Mitsubishi just before the merger, then transferred them to the parent corp for a very healthy profit. If you do not think that some of that money will eventually make its way to Tsukino, then you do not understand the world you're living in.
- Baka Dabora

- Come on, are we seriously saying Tsukino had the foresight to know the audit was coming down when she made hr decision, and that she knew how all the subsequent events would play out? Does she have a bunch of highly skilled diviners in staff or something?
- Haze

- It's not as difficult as all that. Tsukino knew that the split decision would anger Mitsubishi Motors, and they likely knew what the immediate response would be. They had probably already planned Tsukino's advisory opinion, and knew they would have some opportunities to use it. So even if they didn't plan everything else, they knew how the larger strokes would go, and then they were alert and smart enough to pounce on opportunity the moment it arose. Sometimes quick reactions are easy to mistake for foresight, especially when proper groundwork has been laid to make those reactions stick.
- Mr. Bonds

THE JUSTICES

Now that we've established the game being played, let's look at the players. There are thirteen justices on the court. As I mentioned earlier, seven of them are guaranteed seats. By custom, the other members of the Big Ten

also get a seat, though it is easier to remove in case a need arises to remove their AAA status. So that means Evo, Horizon, and Wuxing have a justice in place. The other three are up for grabs. Technically they are available to anyone through the selections of an extremely secretive commission. The number of members on the commission, the number of votes each member gets to appoint a justice, and other such matters, and pretty much any other specifics about this commission are not known. There is weighting toward the largest corps somehow, which has enabled S-K and MCT to keep extra seats for a good long while. The third extra seat has been held by Ares for a number of years now, and the reasons for that are up for discussion.

- It's because that seat is currently occupied by Michelle Borden, who is widely seen as the most easy-to-manipulate justice on the court.
- Kay St. Irregular

- Incorrectly seen, for what it's worth.
- Sunshine

The commission meets every six months to appoint a new member, or re-elect an old one. That would make it seem as if justice terms are six-and-a-half years, but it's not that simple. Sometimes justices are needed elsewhere in their corporations, or they have had enough of the CC life, and they resign before that period is over. The commission only appoints one justice at a time (the assumed reason for that is stability), so if one justice had already been in place for six-and-a-half years but another steps down, the retired justice is replaced, and the one who's supposed to step down gets another six months, at least. The exact specifics of how this rotation is maintained and who is put up when is, of course, secretive. Very few people besides the commission and the justices themselves know who is up for replacement at any given time, which keeps outside campaigning to a minimum, which is how all involved like it.

That hidden process has given us the following thirteen justices:

Alexander Belczyk (Saeder-Krupp): The Duke of the Court, Belczyk is happy to let people assume he is descended from royalty. It's more about how he carries himself than any direct statements of arrogance, but his many years have trained him in how to move and speak

with poise and dignity. He is thoughtful, analytical, and very loyal to Lofwyr. S-K has been walking around with a huge target on its back since the end of the dragon civil war, which has kept Belczyk busy. Now, though, in the wake of CFD, he is getting a chance to be more aggressive, and he is working behind the scenes to organize a coalition that will eventually hand down whatever punishment the court decides to levy.

Emma Binghampton (Horizon): The court socialite, Binghampton is equally skilled with a gavel or a wine glass in her hand. Binghampton has always known that few decisions are actually made in the courtroom, and she is a master at working the process before and (especially) after a hearing. She has been thrown for a bit of a loop by the arrival of Mayumi Tsukino, and she is trying to learn how to work a room she does not automatically dominate as soon as she walks in.

Michele Borden (Ares): Bookies worldwide have made some nice scratch by not having to pay out on bets saying Borden would be off the Court by now. She was too young and too inexperienced, they all said. In over her head, they said. I said that too. But not only is she still here, but respect for her is growing. She was patient, bided her time, didn't make big waves, but then started getting notice for the clear-headed analysis in some concurring opinions she wrote. As Ares has floundered recently, she has been forthright with her colleagues about the struggles and has been willing to make concessions on some decisions when she can get something out of the deal. The more people look back on the deals she has made, the shrewder she seems. As long as she keeps being underestimated, she is going to keep exploiting that mindset. She better hurry—I don't think it will last much longer.

Basima Oriol Diasruíz (Saeder-Krupp): Diasruíz had a rapid rise to the Corporate Court after traveling perhaps the most interesting and unusual path to the Court. She has acted as a security spider, corporate saboteur, combat operative, and SIGINT Grand inquisitor tasked with rooting out head cases from Saeder-Krupp. Her efficiency and ruthlessness in this role inspired Lofwyr to give her a position that did not seem immediately suited to her skills, as deal-making and legal analysis are not things she has spent much time doing previously. But Lofwyr is not looking for a justice to finesse the court—he is looking for someone to ferret out information and use it like a sledgehammer. Diasruíz has absolutely met expectations in that respect.

- She's an infiltration and espionage specialist with Corporate Court credentials. She is an ace security spider who can operate with the authority of GOD. She is terrifying from an information-gathering standpoint. And just about any other standpoint you can imagine.
- Hanibelle

Li Feng (Wuxing): The grand old man of the Court, Li knows things about back room deals that Binghampton has never dreamed of. He has been in overdrive lately. Not missing a step despite the fact that he has been on the Court for nearly two decades, Li has taken full advantage of Wuxing's financial dealings with other corporations that have gone through various crises. The amount of concessions he has extracted from other justices in exchange for better terms on their debt has given a huge boost to Wuxing's shipping operations, which has made AA competitors like Maersk very, very nervous.

Ren Iwano (Evo): When the plot to replace the deceased Justice Yoshiko Hino with a digital version was exposed, Evo needed both a replacement and some damage control. Evo's role in the CFD situation made that need more urgent, but they seem to have chosen the right person for the job. Ren Iwano is the only son of late Yamatetsu CEO Saru Iwano, and he had proven his skills as diplomat and negotiator when rebuilding Evo's relationships with the Japanese government and the Japanacorps. The specter of an Iwano-Kirilenko feud did not seem to affect Ren's advancement any, and now those worries are buried with Kirilenko. While few people think Iwano has his sights set on the leadership of Evo, his work in this time of trouble should firm his position as one of the voices of the corp that must be heeded.

Kenta Merushige (Renraku): The current incarnation of the court is filled with strong-willed individuals, bold debaters, and sly manipulators. And also Kenta Merushige. The amount of family honor Merushige has to repay the corp for his father's failures as head of Renraku Arcology's security will not be met in this lifetime, but Merushige will do his damnedest to try. As a result, he is completely pliable to the will of his superiors. Want to manipulate a Corporate Court justice? Convince Merushige that his superiors want him to take a certain action. Forging correspondence will not be easy, of course, but once you have Merushige believing that the powers that be at Renraku want him to do a certain thing, no amount of logic, bribery, blackmail, or force will sway him.

Steven Nishimura (Shiawase): The Court has plenty of people willing to put on charm offensives, as well as Nishimura, who is just plain offensive. Whether Nishimura actually hates everyone or just pretends to hate everyone to get a rise out of people, the effect is the same—he is not pleasant to be around, he picks relentlessly at anyone the least bit different from him, and he feels a filter is for people not brave enough to say what they really think. He's vile but eminently quotable, and one of the few justices whose questions during a Court hearing give you a clear idea of how he is thinking and what he will decide.

Chief Justice Lynn Osborne (NeoNET): NeoNET does not have a lot going in their favor right now, but having the Chief Justice of the Court being their representative is one plus. Osborne's grandmotherly demeanor (despite her shiny ork tusks) has won her plenty of allies, but she is not all cookies and knitting. She is a tireless worker and relentless negotiator, and she has been putting

long hours in trying to find ways to minimize the losses NeoNET is sure to experience in the CFD fallout. If kindness could save the corp, their future would be secured, but it is increasingly looking like that won't be enough. Whatever shape NeoNET takes after the eventual punishment, the thinking is that Osborne will stay, remaining in the seat earned by JRJ International. Whoever ends up with that seat would be lucky to have her.

- Osborne was responsible for a lot of rulings that went against Lofwyr during the dragon civil war. If he can figure out a way to get her to slide out of the court as part of NeoNET's troubles, he absolutely will.
- Dr. Spin

Charles Rascome (Ares): An excellent legal mind and quite loyal to Damien Knight, Rascome would seem to be an ideal addition to the Corporate Court for Ares. He has indeed demonstrated an excellent legal mind, but so far he is lagging behind in the backroom-dealmaking game. He seems to want the Court to proceed through logic and legal precedent, which is not how things work. All signs point to him being a quick study, though, and he has the intellectual heft to keep him moving forward until he gets the social part of the job right.

Kosuke Shimizu (MCT): The skills Shimizu has displayed in playing the long game have already been covered. He remains a wild card on the Court, willing to play bad cop to Mayumi Tsukino's good cop, and not seemingly loyal to any particular faction in MCT. More than once he has made decisions that seem likely to enrage his parent corp, only to have events proceed so that the decision actually works in MCT's favor. Is he lucky, skilled, or the beneficiary of some truly excellent soothsaying? Plenty of Court observers would like to know.

Mayumi Tsukino (MCT): Representing some of the shifts MCT has seen in recent years, Tsukino was the chief counsel with Mitsuhama Magical Services until her appointment to the Court (having spent her entire career within MCT subsidiaries and divisions). As a social adept she made impressive progress through Terra-based courtrooms, but the Corporate Court has caused some problems. The fact that many justices are full- or part-time residents of the Zurich-Orbital Habitat, and that many proceedings take place outside of the manasphere, has left her to rely on conventional gifts of oratory, person reading, and negotiation without magical support. Unfortunately, she has stumbled a little in her role, and recovering from her mistakes has caused her to lean a little on MCT leadership. She's going to have to pay a few dues and favors before she can exert the same independence as her colleague Shimizu.

Necali Xólotl (Aztechnology): Xólotl has seen wild changes in Aztechnology's fortunes in his time on the Court. From the depths of the Azt-Am War to Aztlan's eventual victory, from the devastating attacks on the megacorp's food supply to its triumphal return to Denver, Xólotl has had plenty of aggression and defense occurring during his time on the Court, and some say the wear and tear is beginning to show. His oddly humble and gentle demeanor remains in place, but some observers have reported that he has become somewhat scattered, authoring opinions that verge on incoherence until a clerk cleans them up. He could probably use some peace and quiet, but if that's the case, he's working for the wrong corp.

As is the case with any small body like this, certain alliances and cliques have developed within the Court. The Japanacorps judges, naturally, form a potent bloc of four votes, and Iwano's work in Japan means they are often able to attract a fifth vote. Almost invariably, Li Feng from Wuxing puts himself on the other side of the Japanacorps justices.

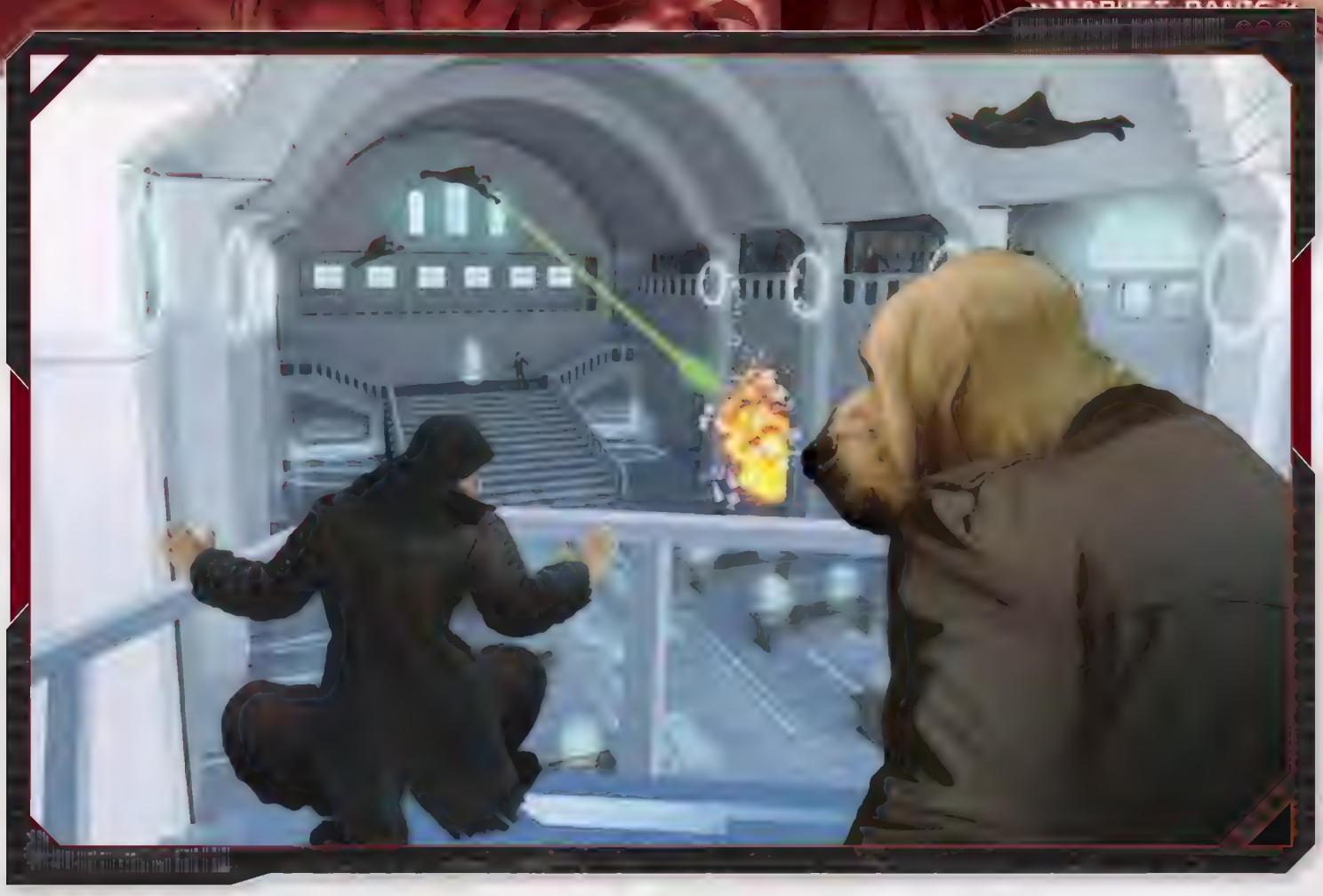
There are also contrasting views toward lower-level corps, which the wake of the Megacorporate Revision has made more clear. Binghampton from Horizon, Osborne from NeoNET, Iwano from Evo, and Merushige from Renraku (when he is allowed to think for himself) are more likely to see the As and AAs as healthy soil from which the AAAs grow; to them, what's good for the lower-rated corps is often good for the Big Ten. On the other hand, Nishimura from Shiawase, Shimizu from MCT, Xólotl from Azechnology, and Diasruiz from Saeder-Krupp tend to see the lower ranks as a Darwinian battlefield, where those who cannot fend off attacks from the stronger corps deserve to get gobbled up or destroyed. Want to look for the core supporters of the Megacorporate Revision? Look no further. That leaves the other justices as swing votes in affairs regarding the audit; keep that in mind when looking at who to influence.

- Also keep in mind that instructions from higher authorities can easily disrupt these voting blocs.
- Mr. Bonds

ZURICH-ORBITAL HABITAT: ABOVE YOU IN EVERY SENSE

When you were young, maybe someone talked to you about how if you were good, you would eventually ascend from this earthly veil of tears to a better place, a place of safety, health, and peace. A place where your needs were met, where you sipped on the nectar of the gods, and where you could look down on Earth from a great distance and contemplate its follies while remaining above it all.

They may have thought they were describing some mystical heaven, but in truth that place is the Zurich-Orbital Habitat. With high security, no lower-class (or even middle-class) residents, and perpetually sterile air, it is the safest place known to the Sixth World, and it is where



the Corporate Court has its base of operations. It is also where the Zurich-Orbital Gemeinschaft Bank is based. Along with the Corporate Court Matrix Authority and its Grid Overwatch Division. Yes, this is a craft that has an astonishing amount of control over your daily life, and it is very careful to continuously fly out of your reach.

The Zurich-Orbital Gemeinschaft Bank is the most powerful financial institution in the world, the issuer and regulator of the nuyen. Each of the Big Ten gets a share of the bank with its AAA rating, and they are very dedicated to the strength and security of the bank. Many of the operations are relegated to the Court's earthly base in the Towers in Manhattan, but critical matters like developing and maintaining currency encryption standards take place in the rarified non-air of space, safe from all but the most determined of hackers.

- I promise I'll get to breaking into Z-OGB soon. I've been busy, is all.
- Slamm-0!

Those encryption standards are maintained by the most powerful Matrix security organization known to metahumanity, the Corporate Court Matrix Authority (CCMA) and its feared Grid Overwatch Division. It's simple—if they don't scare you, it's because you have never tried to hack the new Matrix. Their best agents hover above the Earth like a virtual Thor shot, waiting to blast blinding dumpshock with horrible precision. The ones on the ground are not much nicer.

The presence of the CCMA also means the habitat is the home of the Corporate Court archives. I know that electronic files having any sort of a home is a bit of an antiquated notion in this cloud-based day and age, and the public part of the archive is as decentralized as any other part of the Matrix. The private archives, though, are another story. This is the home of the messages exchanged between justices, drafts of opinions, communications between justices and their earthbound superiors—basically a treasure trove for those who want to know how the Court really works. Which means it's horribly difficult to get into, and even more difficult to stay in for any length of time without having your synapses fried to a crisp.

With all the demands on it, the habitat has grown year after year, though perhaps not as much as you might expect, as many operations are impractical for orbital operation. The habitat is also expanding due to the rich and powerful looking for a ticket to Zurich-Orbital as the ultimate sign that they have paid their way into heaven.

ARES MACROTECHNOLOGY

Inside the stark gray cargo bay, Dryl tested her helmet seal to ensure it was airtight and then locked it down again for good measure. A tap on her O2 gauge showed it was registering normal. No leaks visible in her pressure suit. Suit batteries were charged and full. Everything green across the board.

Her helmet's AR mission clock chimed to alert her of the approach window. Dryl checked all of her gauges and readouts once more.

No use in taking chances. It was easy enough to die on the ground, but in space even the stupidest thing could kill you.

Braced against the bulkhead, she felt the transit vessel's braking thrusters fire. That was her cue. Once the ship docked, the cargo bay would lose atmosphere, the access hatch would open, and loader drones would come in and start carting cargo back to the station. Dryl needed to be gone before that happened.

She had hacked the hatch's safeguards days ago, so all she had to do now was depressurize the bay and open the door. The hatch opened soundlessly on the sunlit vista of *Daedalus*, an AresSpace station seemingly hovering at Earth's L4 Lagrange point. A surprising amount of distance stretched between her and the station. *Too much*, she thought with a swallow. But Dryl was a professional.

She took a deep breath and aimed herself at one of the rounded-square EVA airlocks. Rethought her angle. Repositioned herself.

Measure twice, cut once.

Then she launched herself out into the void.

Dryl stashed the suit in the airlock and floated through the compartments of *Daedalus* in an AresSpace uniform and ID that made her look legit. Few bothered to check. Security on a space station this large and this far from Earth orbit was less a priority than one might expect. Getting in space was hard enough—that whole easy-to-die-up-here thing was hard to ignore—so the average worker assumed most people up here were probably *supposed* to be here, and the visual test was easy enough to fake.

She worked her way through the byzantine maze of the space station until she reached a locked hatch leading to one of the distal modules of the station, according to her AR map. No avenue of escape.

She waited until the coast was clear and user her electronic skeleton key to bypass the lock. Someone who couldn't get around a lock like that had no business billing herself as an assassin.

The cramped compartment proved to be a living space of some kind, just like she expected. But it was empty. A zero-gravity hospital bed and some open cabinets were the only proof anyone had ever been here. Her target, who had remained in this very spot for years recovering from injuries sustained during the last attempt on his life, was gone.

Panic flashed her into disaster-recovery mode.

"You're not supposed to be in here," a gruff voice barked from behind.

Dryl turned to see a fellow ork in an AresSpace uniform. She lunged for the open hatch, but it was already closing, closing, closing—and then nearly slammed shut on her fingers. A hard *ka-chunk* resounded through the compartment. The ork had engaged the manual lock. No way she could hack her way through that.

She straightened and glared at him, bared her tusks, slammed both fists on the door. "Let me out!"

"You have no idea who you are dealing with," the man said.

He slapped another control on his side of the door, and a deafening hiss filled the room. Atmosphere was evacuating the module ...

Dryl's eardrums popped from the drop in pressure, and blackness stole her vision.

ARES MACROTECHNOLOGY

Corporate Court Ranking (2077): #9
Corporate Slogan: "Making the World a Safer Place"
Corporate Status: AAA, public corporation
Worlds Headquarters: Detroit, UCAS
President/CEO: Damien Knight
Major Shareholders: Damien Knight (23.7%), Arthur Vogel (24.1%), Gavilan Ventures (12.2%)

MAJOR DIVISIONS AND NOTABLE SUBSIDIARIES

Ares Arms

Fleche Armaments (miltech systems), Israel Military Industries (armament)

Ares Consumer Products

BacteriTech (biotech), Cerebrotech (cyberware, optics), Crystal Optics (electronics/cybernetics), General Dynamics (electronics), Leviathan Technical (communications/electronics/cybertech), Lifescape (AR/sim/software), Quick Trigger Systems (software), Unlimited Technologies (hybrid technologies/research)

Ares Heavy Industry

Ares Integrated Solutions (heavy industry) General Motors (heavy industry/automotive), Honda-GM (automotive), MosTrans (automotive/naval)

Ares Services

Ares Global Entertainment (sim/trid production), Executive Protection Services (personal security), Hard Corps (security service provider), Info Santé (medical service provider), Mercury Express (delivery service), Quantas (airline), Wolverine Security (security service provider)

AresSpace

AresSpace Commsat (aerospace/communications), AresSpace Lifters (orbital construction/transport), NASA Consulting, Inc. (aerospace/orbital management)

Knight Errant Security Services

GOD OF WAR

POSTED BY: COSMO

Ten-hut, maggot!

You think because you've got a Predator shoved in a concealed holster you know Ares Macrotechnology like the back of your cybernetic hand? Think again. Go learn as much as you can about the military—its structure, its culture, its internal and external politics—and then come talk to me about what you actually know about military life. Hell, go enlist in whatever nation or corp's armed forces you prefer. Serve in a tour of duty. Engage in some combat while you're at it. I'll wait.

"But, *Cosmo*," I hear you whining already, "I've *been* in combat. I can field strip a [insert fad, mass-market weapon of choice] in [n, where n = bragging rights amount] seconds! I've seen the entire [insert trendy, brainless military movie franchise] series! I know some people who fought in Desert Wars!"

Well, you can stick a vulcanized rubber cork in it. No matter how much you think you know, theory is no substitute for experience. If you've never slogged through literal trenches, the only way you'll be able to really understand Ares is if you work for them as a corporate drone.

For all you veterans, the ones who have successfully (or at least semi-successfully) pulled off runs against the weapons giant in the past, be aware that things have changed dramatically over the last few years. Between faulty, overhyped products, major shareholder suicides, and a whole host of other woes, Ares has changed the face of how it does business, just to stay alive. More than many of the other Big Ten megas, Ares is perhaps the most paranoid of losing its coveted AAA rating, which has resulted in a number of drastic, across-the-board changes that have made the corp a far tougher nut to crack than it was before. In many cases, figurative boardroom warfare has transformed into literal warfare, both in and out of the shadows. There is plenty of work to be had on both sides of the line, but not knowing your tar-

get—or your employer, as the case might be—is a surefire way to get yourself killed in action.

In the end, Ares is leaner, meaner, and more efficient than before. But like every military, there's still a lot of crimson ribbon to slash through, which means plenty of opportunities to exploit such military-style bureaucracy. Knowing how a military force works is step one to understanding Ares. Step two is knowing what to do with that knowledge.

But again, knowledge and practice are separated by a wide gulf. And as any soldier or ex-military man will tell you, no plan survives contact with the enemy.

MORE THAN JUST GUNS

Your average Joe Chummer probably believes that Ares just makes firearms: reliable, good-quality, reasonably priced firearms—although there are some really notable exceptions (more on that later). Problem is, that's only Ares Arms, just one aspect of their business; it simply happens to be their most visible, the first thing people think of when someone says "Ares" (more so than the actual Greek god of war the company was named after, if Matrix searches are any indication). As the late, great Robert Heinlein said, specialization is for insects, and that goes doubly for megacorps with as much influence in global militaries as Ares has. So while you can hit up your local Weapons World and pick out your favorite form of "personal defense"—meaning offense, since that's what the best defense technically is—you can also stop at your favorite trid node (which is probably owned by Ares Global Entertainment) and buy—or crib, if you prefer—a copy of the latest espionage thriller or a new bit of wax laid down by your favorite novahot artist. Unless you're an astronaut or are getting paid to do so, you probably won't ever need to go into space, but if you do, odds are you'll be launching into orbit in an Ares Doru and your destination will either be an Ares-made satellite or space habitat; all of these will have an AresSpace logo stamped onto the side and were likely manufactured in whole or in part in an Ares Heavy Industry plant, and probably using Ares-branded components and hardware. And that shiny new commlink you picked up recently, the ACE Commando? That's Ares too—Ares Consumer Electronics, part of the Ares Consumer Products division—even if it doesn't say so on the front. (That's just a tiny facet of Ares trying to rebrand itself, but more about that later.)

On top of all that, personal and mil-spec weaponry from Ares Arms is just the tip of the proverbial iceberg when it comes to how many fingers Ares has—or at least *had*, past tense—in all the many military pies across the globe. In addition to weapons, Ares provides top-notch military consulting services. Do you represent a small unrated or A-rated corp and are interested in raising a corporate backed military? Or perhaps you just successfully launched a coup d'état and now find yourself

in control of your own fledgling nation, and you have no idea what to do next, militarily speaking? Well, Ares has got you covered, no questions asked. Their military advisors offer their services to anyone willing and able to foot the bill.

- This sadly also includes groups of zealots armed with guns. Anyone ever read about that pre-Awakening fiasco in Waco, Texas? The cult's compound burned to the ground during an ATF raid, and all but a handful of cultists died. Had the cult leader been a multimillionaire with Ares advising him, things would've gone very, very differently.
- Goat Foot

- If Ares and its subsidiaries had been around back then, my nuyen would be on the cultists having an Ares military advisor and a large cache of Ares weaponry, and the ATF agents raiding the compound—also kitted out in Ares arms and equipment—would've been Knight Errant law enforcement. All Ares, all the time. The best war is the one you can fight on both sides.
- Sticks

Then there's all of the security and law-enforcement companies: Knight Errant, an entity unto itself that currently holds the police contract for the Seattle metroplex; Executive Protection Services; Hard Corps, Wolverine Security. If you need something or someone kept safe or alive or law abiding, Ares has a service guaranteed to fit the bill.

- Make damn sure you read the fine print on that Ares-affiliated security guarantee before you sign it. There are lots of loopholes Ares can jump through to get out of paying out insurance on stolen or killed goods. Alleged negligence, semantics regarding the item description, various escape clauses, a confusing and obfuscated section essentially stating that stolen goods or kidnapped people are ineligible for their protection services—stuff like that.
- DangerSensei

So yeah, if you just think "Ares = guns," then you're oblivious to a lot of pieces of the corp's pie, which means missing out on potential jobs and nuyen. Educate yourself, and I'm sure you'll find something that aligns with your favorite brand of misanthropic mischief.

HISTORY

In the early twenty-first century, wealthy investor Nicholas Aurelius took a huge gamble and merged GM and several other companies he owned into one big extra-territorial conglomerate called Ares Industries, rechristened Ares Macrotechnology, Inc. in 2024. Before the Crash of '29, the gamble had already paid off big, which led to Ol' Nick buying up and revitalizing the struggling NASA program from the US government and selling the space station *Zurich-Orbital* (née *Freedom*) to the Corporate Court. From there, Ares Industries went on to equip a whole bunch of EuroWars armies, salvage all kinds of space junk left adrift after Crash 1.0, and begin to make itself a household name in the UCAS, home of the corp's HQ.

On 24 January 2033, just a few months after Nick suffered a fatal heart attack, the future of Ares shifted when a new player entered the scene. In the span of sixty seconds, a previously unheard-of investor snatched up a controlling interest in the company via a series of prearranged Matrix transactions that no one has been able to duplicate since. This new investor was Damien Knight, who has been the public face of Ares for more than four decades. This "Nanosecond Buyout" unseated Ol' Nick's son, Leonard, and Knight took over as CEO and chairman of the board.

Though Knight and Leonard maintained a heated rivalry, Ares prospered with Knight at the helm. His initiatives during the '40s and '50s included such things as the founding of Knight Errant Security Services and the fostering of what would eventually become Ares Global Entertainment in 2055. Insect spirit hives were first discovered in that same year, but the resultant Chicago disaster remains a major black mark on the corp's public image.

- Once bugs are involved, there's really no optimum, one-size-fits-all approach to dealing with them. Ares did the best they could with the knowledge they had at the time. But thankfully we know a lot more about them now than we did back then.
- Axis Mundi

- Learning is a two-way street, omae.
- Sticks

The rivalry saw Knight and Leonard rotate in and out of the chairman slot, but Knight eventually came out on top. Leonard watched Knight run his father's empire until the assassination of UCAS President-elect Dunkelzahn in 2057, when the great dragon's will gave him the out he was looking for.

The Big D's last will and testament bequeathed his seat on Ares's board of directors to Arthur Vogel, an eco-lawyer who had run against Dunkelzahn in the election. Ares's third major shareholder, Gavilan Ventures, was a corporation owned by Dunkelzahn and bequeathed to Nadja Daviar, the former Voice of Dunkelzahn and then-UCAS VP. Leonard saw this opportunity and sold all of his shares to Vogel, meaning that between Vogel and Daviar, they would have enough power to oppose Knight. Leonard then took the money from his sale and defected to AA corp Cross Applied Technol-

ogies. Unfortunately for him, during the chaos following Crash 2.0, Knight acquired most of Cross and worked to dismantle what he didn't buy.

Leonard got the last laugh shortly after Nadja Daviar went missing in 2071, when Gavilan Ventures named Leonard's son, Nicholas "Young Nick" Aurelius, its proxy on the board. Nick quickly aligned in Vogel's camp, further thwarting Knight's agendas. To worsen matters, Roger Soaring-Owl, CEO of Knight Errant and one of Knight's trusted advisors and confidants, suddenly resigned in '72 over some undisclosed matter involving UnlimiTech—something bug spirit related, according to multiple insiders—and jumped ship to be a military consultant for the Sioux Nation. The final blow to Ares's ego was Horizon's sudden acquisition of the media giant Truman Distribution Network. Though the takeover surprised the whole Ares board, the departure of TDN represented more of a loss on a personal level rather than a fiscal one.

At this point, Ares was rolling in dough. They were positively swimming in defense contracts for the UCAS and had good relations with President Colloton. Knight Errant had become a visible driving force in the war against the bugs. Ares—in the eyes of the public, at least—was the golden boy of the Big Ten, incapable of doing wrong and looked on favorably from everyone in need of firearms, military expertise, aerospace, exterminators, entertainment, and so on.

But much of that was surface glitter hiding internal rot. When the Excalibur problem happened, it revealed a depth of weakness that surprised pretty much every observer. Stunningly, Ares's fate went from rock-solid to uncertain with remarkable speed.

CURRENT EVENTS

THE BROKEN SWORD

I'm just going to assume you've heard about the whole debacle surrounding the Ares Excalibur M-256 Battle Rifle—I mean, who *hasn't*? Even regular people who aren't even remotely interested in anything related to militaries or the shadows have heard about it. The normally polite old lady living above your safehouse has probably even heard about it and has already formed an opinion, to boot.

But anyway, if for some reason you've been living off the grid somewhere or got trapped in some kind of Matrix K-hole, here's what happened. Ares was working on something that eventually became known to the consumer public as the Excalibur. (If you want to know some of the speculative origins of the ill-fated M-256, go read the *Storm Front* download.) It was touted as "THE LAST ASSAULT RIFLE YOU'LL EVER BUY"—and man, did Ares not know exactly how prophetic that tagline would actually be (and in more ways than one). The corp hyped this thing like mad, going so far as to saturate awareness so that even demographics that wouldn't know which end of a gun the bullet is supposed to come out of knew about the damned thing. Ares's marketing arm wallpapered AROs all over every sprawl in every country the Excalibur would eventually be available. They plugged so many Desert Wars and Urban Brawl trid spots that the casual observer probably didn't think anyone else was advertising in those events. (In case you're wondering, yes, there *were* other advertisers that year.) Long story short, the Excalibur did pretty much what any overhyped product ends up doing: it bombed. Except it bombed in a spectacular way, both in the corp's wallet and in the court of public opinion.

Okay, so *maybe* the umpteenth installment of *Neil the Ork Barbarian* wasn't as great as the (purposefully) leaked trailers made it out to be, but at worst, that would only cost Brilliant Genesis Studios some minor cash flow—especially since millions of people still downloaded it when it came out, mostly just to see what the fuss was about. Back in the days where corps were beholden to national governments, a corp with a bad product could chalk it up to a tax write-off; in fact, under the render-unto-Caesar era of corporate business, products were sometimes *designed* to flop just so the corp would have something to claim as a liability on their tax return. These days that just isn't the case—unless you're an unrated or A-rated corporation, and Ares has a few too many A's in its rating to qualify. The problem with the Excalibur is that Ares didn't merely put out a bad product. It released a substandard product with the full backing and reputation of Ares Arms, and that product wasn't just a simple disappointment: it was a *travesty*.

Movie studio makes a bad movie, people forget about it a few weeks later. Hell, sometimes the movie is so bad that it in and of itself becomes a conversation piece or even a cultural touchstone. If a weapon manufacturer makes a gun that literally *gets its users killed*, that's not something the public is bound to forget. Do you remember when the last Chrysler-Nissan recall was? That one where the Fargo's brakes wouldn't work? That defect that caused so many accidents that C-N ended up retiring that model outright. Well, why did people keep buying C-N Jackrabbits after that point? Because the Fargo was a less-popular model that only people who owned one really knew about. Jackrabbits, on the other hand are ubiquitous: everyone has one—or has a one of the many knockoffs. Had the recall affected Jackrabbits, C-N would've understood what Ares is going through now.

Worse still is the idea that the Excalibur's terrible reputation spilled over into everything with an Ares logo slapped on it. People became hesitant to pick up another Predator, for fear that it had been machined on the same assembly lines as the Excalibur. Others were leery of flying on AresSpace-manufactured airliners. Sales of Ares Consumer Products took a nosedive. Clients fired

their Ares military advisors and hired from other concerns. Even the UCAS Armed Forces, one of Ares's most profitable business centers, opted to let a good many of their defense contracts expire and then awarded them to other contractors. The only major subsidiary largely unaffected by consumer confidence was Knight Errant.

- Some rumors going around say Ares's board is trying to convince Knight to sell off KE in order to use the proceeds of the sale to literally buy back some consumer confidence.
- Hard Exit

- Yeah, no way in hell is that going to happen.
- Sticks

- Stranger things have happened.
- Kia

- The only way Knight would even consider liquidating his baby is if he already had a plan in place to easily reacquire it down the road.
- Mr. Bonds

The big thing to keep in mind is that the Excalibur alone wasn't the *real* problem plaguing Ares. Sure, it cost them a lot of market share, and their stock prices took a two-by-four to the face as a result, but that was only a symptom of the problem. It's like when a rich guy goes on a bender, wrecks his car, and kills his passenger: that's a surefire scandal, but most reporters won't bother to ask *why* the guy started drinking so heavily in the first place. Even though that's the real story.

THE NEW FACE OF WAR

To remain competitive in all its markets after the Excalibur eroded consumer confidence, Ares decided to do the unthinkable: it hired fellow AAA megacorp Horizon on the down-low to tackle damage control and revitalize the Ares image. Now, you might know that corps, even the AAAs, do business with each other on a regular basis. Though they often seem large, monolithic entities capable of funding, supplying, and equipping their own ventures, no corp is 100 percent self-sufficient. Two corps entering a mutually beneficial business arrangement is not in itself unusual. However, Ares and Horizon's arrangement goes far beyond most intercorporate relationships. Your average interaction involves the simple exchange of money for goods and/or services, and the relationship terminates once the transaction is complete. (Most other transactions tend to be of the shadowrun nature.) For Ares to take full advantage of this arrangement with Horizon, the corp needed to give Horizon access to potentially damning information, if only so that Horizon would be privy to the full extent of the damage Excalibur caused, essentially to best diagnose the patient. Ares is of course keeping its darkest secrets under wraps, but Horizon has ways of making people talk without them realizing they've been saying anything.

- For the record, Damien Knight was fully against bringing in Horizon for damage control, but the board outvoted him. Any negative impact of this alliance-of-convenience with Horizon will let Knight pull out that big "i told you so" placard he's been keeping in his back pocket since the deal was first inked.
- Dr. Spin

- Sounds like he wouldn't be above hiring deniable assets to sabotage Horizon's efforts and make that "I told you so" true.
- Turbo Bunny

- Okay, but on the other end of the spectrum, what's to keep Horizon from sabotaging Ares's rebranding efforts? I'm sure they'd love to take advantage of Ares's financial woes by making them worse and snapping up a controlling interest in Ares Global Entertainment—or just erase AGE from the capitalist landscape entirely.
- Sunshine

- I doubt Horizon would stoop to scorched-earth policy just to snub Ares.
- Dr. Spin

So far, Horizon's damage-control and rebranding assistance efforts seem to have paid off modestly well for Ares. The largest resurgence in customer confidence over the past few years has come from Ares Consumer Products. Everything from fashion lines to small appliances to personal electronics and even nonmilitary cyberware have received a slick new look that makes ACP offerings all the rage among the buying public. Some might argue this fresh look is nothing truly revolutionary, but the move away from machined, faux-military style products toward a uniform look that sports a sleek white base with soft blue or green accents is a vast departure that has made buyers take notice. Many lines advertise style over substance—for example, the aWare line of wearable electronics or the aBurn high-speed bagel toaster—and reviews that criticize or downplay the actual specs of a product always praise its simple yet elegant design. "THEY JUST MAKE SENSE" is the tagline for every new product that has a lowercase *a* slapped in front of the name.

- Eye candy's all fine and good, but if Ares frags with the Predator's design, I will up and cut a bitch. I ain't gonna wear no foofy-looking "aPredator"—or whatever the frag they'd probably end up rebranding it.
- 2XL

- Cool your jets. Ares Arms isn't that stupid. And Predators aren't really aimed at the fashion-conscious customer anyway.
- Hard Exit

- Classic Predators will never go out of style.
- Fianchetto

Now that Horizon knows some of Ares's secrets—at least those Ares felt obligated to divulge—it wouldn't surprise me if Horizon uses them as leverage further down the road.

OUTBREAK CONTAINMENT

In addition to the sweeping changes in branding and PR that Horizon suggested, Ares also excised large portions of subsidiaries BacteriTech and Ares Integrated Solutions. This reactionary measure came in the wake of the CFD disaster, since the virus had been shown to propagate from nanotech hives and geneware. The board felt that, rather than run the risk of seeing the corp's reputation tarnished even further, it was better to cut their losses and play it safe by exiting the genetech and nanotech business altogether.

BacteriTech's genetech department and AIS's nanotechnology research were dismantled and liquidated with extreme prejudice. Ares went so far that it's nearly impossible to find any trace that either subsidiary ever dipped a toe in the genetech/nanotech pool, aside from talks regarding the space elevator's construction. Although there's no real evidence Ares was responsible for the genesis of CFD, the Matrix-based virus is pernicious enough that the board wanted to ensure no fingers pointed toward Detroit.

- I don't believe those shutterings for even a nanosecond. Ares made *whole bug spirit* hives to study them and use them to try taking out other hives. How naïve would you have to be to think they *aren't* studying CFD just as intently as everyone else? And since Ares is obligated to weaponize everything, I can guarantee you they're trying to find a way to do that with CFD.
- Sticks

- You mean to fight CFD with CFD? Or to find some way to deliberately infect someone with CFD?
- Butch

- In this case, fighting fire with fire won't work.
- Bull

JUST SAY NO: THE WAR ON BUGS

Okay, so if the Excalibur was just the symptom, what was the problem? Call me paranoid, but I can say with confidence that most of it boils down to one word: bugs.

- I think you give the bugs too much credit.
- Sticks

- Never thought I'd hear those words come out of your mouth.
- Slamm-0!

Ares, and Knight Errant in particular, has been involved with insect spirits in some form or another since the fraggers were first discovered. Whole divisions of Knight Errant have devoted themselves to stomping out bug infestations wherever they appear, and they've learned a lot since the Cermak Blast in Chicago. But not everything Ares has done has been quite so heroic and on-the-level (surprise, surprise!). A number of top-secret research projects have involved bugs in some form or another, and not all of them are geared toward the most efficient means of killing insect spirits.

The internal damage done to the corp comes down to two things: personnel loss and bug influence.

KILLED IN ACTION

As far as personnel loss goes, rumor says Roger Soaring-Owl outright quit over one of these insect-spirit projects, which left Knight Errant bereft of one of its biggest advocates. The bigger loss, felt across the whole megacorp and all of its subsidiaries in some measure or another, was the death of Ares's conscience, Young Nick Aurelius.

According to reports that fell off the back of a truck somewhere in Detroit, Aurelius was overseeing two major projects involving bugs. The first of these, Project Avalon, was meant to discover efficient manatech weapons that would give Knight Errant FireWatch teams even more effective means of clearing out hives. For reasons unknown, the project's plug was pulled, and Avalon was folded into standard Ares Arms R&D. The second project, code-named Pyro, involved whole teams attempting to train bug spirits to attack other hives, using the base insect's natural hostility toward other insects—for example, mantid spirits clearing out an ant spirit hive. The gist was the weapons from Project Avalon could be used to put an end to a Pyro hive once its effectiveness diminished or if the subjects decided to get testy and rebel against their handlers. But something went horribly wrong, and Nick threw himself out of a private jet that was presumably being chased down by slotted-off wasp spirits out for revenge.

The big problem with Nick's absence is that he was the one putting the brakes on the most unsafe parts of

Avalon and Pyro. Now that he is permanently out of the picture, drek is bound to get ugly. Though Avalon was shuttered, Pyro is still going on, and all it takes is one wrong shadowrun to bust open that particular Pandora's box.

- Sounds like Nick got just what he deserved.
- Kane

- When you have to play with fire, you do it smart: you wear fire-retardant clothing, gloves, a mask. Nick was the safety equipment. The idiots who inherited his bug-related projects are running into the furnace buck naked.
- Sticks

A WRETCHED HIVE OF SCUM AND VILLAINY

Ares's recent woes can also be traced to how much bug influence is present within the corp itself. Ares has had a long history with insect spirits, and depending on which crackpot conspiracy theorist you listen to, anywhere between twenty to eight percent of Ares's workers are flesh-form bug spirits. The most believable conspiracies tend to have kernels of truth in them, so it is probably safe to assume that at least *some* Ares personnel are infested just from the hazards of association. The real question isn't necessarily *how many*, but *who* and *why*. Do the bugs now control large swaths of the megacorp, or do they only have flesh forms in key positions, where they can do the most harm?

- If the bugs were really in control of Ares at any level of leadership, I'd imagine they would take their revenge by liquidating all of the corp's assets and burning everything to the ground.
- Kia

- The bugs' reasoning is completely alien to us. Perhaps their interpretation of revenge is simply supplanting every single metahuman in the corp with a buggy version? "You kill us because you do not understand us, so we will make you one of us."
- Sticks

- I take it back. That sounds creepy as hell.
- Kia

Regardless of the truth to such speculation, the fact remains that Ares is under bug influence in some fashion, even it is simply the often single-minded focus of trying to eradicate them. Ares was already losing substantial amounts of money by funding their war against insect spirits without a real return on investment (apart from FireWatch earning their public reputation as "the first and last line of defense against insect spirit incursion"). Avalon had the chance to be a weapon Ares could market to wide success across the globe and recoup some of those expenses, but the project's shuttering killed that idea. The Excalibur's abysmal failure only worsened the corp's hemorrhaging.

Whether flesh forms or single-mindedness are the real culprit, insect spirits are a slowly festering cancer threatening to crumble Ares from within.

BOARDROOM SHUFFLE

On the cusp of rebranding itself and its image, Ares teeters on the brink of change, which has necessitated several shifts in the status quo. Young Nick's death was only the first of several major shakeups, and even more are expected to follow. Here are the highlights.

MEET THE NEW CO, SAME AS THE OLD CO

Say it with me, everyone: *Plus ça change plus c'est la même chose*. The more things change at Ares, the more they stay the same, and nothing demonstrates that better than the fallout of Young Nick's death. The Gavilan Ventures board seat left vacant by Nick's apparent suicide left a hole in Damien Knight's opposition, and Gavilan was slow to name their proxy replacement. By citing a clause in the board's bylaws that allowed voting to continue if a board seat remains vacant for a certain period of time, Knight took advantage of the GV vote's absence by instituting a number of measures that Vogel alone didn't have the numbers to oppose.

A few weeks later, Nadja Daviar resumed the Gavilan Ventures seat on the board and did her best to undo the damage Knight's votes caused. (Rumor has it she hired some runners to tie up some of the loose ends.) Two weeks after Daviar's appointment, a new proxy took her place in the Detroit boardroom: Leonard Aurelius, Young Nick's father. Knight was understandably furious.

Gavilan's reasons for choosing Leonard and his own reasons for accepting the proxy seat aren't quite clear. On the surface, Gavilan seemed intent on challenging Knight's chairmanship due to the Excalibur crisis, and Leonard seems focused on taking back some measure of control over the corporation his father built. Market experts theorize that Leonard has his sights set on the chairman's seat, but be assured Knight will do everything in his power to stay seated right where he is.

- The rumor mill says Lenny's looking to hire an army of deckers and technomancers to try a repeat of Knight's original 2033 buyout. "Nanosecond Buyout 2.0," anyone?
- Glitch

- You can't buy stocks that aren't for sale.
- Mr. Bonds

- *Everything* is for sale.
- Am-Mut

- Whose stocks would he try to buy? Gavilan's? That way he'd have an actual board seat as a shareholder and not just a proxy.
- Kia

- I thought Leonard was broke—or at least near enough—after Cross got dismantled.
- Sticks

COURTS-MARTIAL

Ares is one of only three megacorps with two justices on the Corporate Court. Last year, Ares justice Octavia Laux-Denier, who had talked of retiring for quite some time, finally pulled that plug and gave up her seat. No one is quite sure the real circumstances behind her decision. Though she often cites "family matters," she has opted to remain aboard Zurich-Orbital for the time being instead of returning to Earth.

- Blackmail is the current reason of the day. By whom is anybody's guess.
- Sunshine

- That's not it. It's hard to assassinate someone in space. Why else do you think Vogel is hiding out up there?
- Orbital DK

- Hard, yes, but not impossible. No, I'm thinking there's something else going on.
- Sunshine

After Octavia retired, Damien Knight took advantage of the vacuum created by GV's vacant board seat to name one Charles Rascome, Esq. to the Corporate Court. Before Chuck shipped off to Z-O, he had been a high-profile corporate lawyer with ties to the CAS government. (More on the importance of this in a minute.) With Knight flailing for power, Rascome was an inspired choice. Not only is he clearly in Knight's pocket and willing to tolerate space travel—unlike his Vogel-backed colleague, Justice Michele Borden—but Rascome's successful vetting and installment shows Knight still retains some measure of control within the current power structure.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

Perhaps one of the most critical occurrences regarding the future of Ares deals with the mega's relationship with the UCAS, the nation that borders Ares's Detroit offices. Fallout of the Excalibur's abysmal failure—among other minor things that aren't worth going into here—led to a noticeable falling out between Ares and the UCAS government. President Colloton and the Joint Chiefs' lack of confidence in Ares resulted in the expiration—or in the most extreme cases, outright revocation—of countless defense contracts. Though most Ares subsidiaries felt little direct impact from this turn of events, by comparison Ares Arms, the corp's flagship brand, was left to twist in the wind, and only quick triage could save it.

At this point, Knight started cementing ties with the UCAS's southern neighbor. Through some stroke of luck, the CAS had managed to escape the worst of the Excalibur's bad reputation solely due to their military having far fewer defense contracts with Ares, none of those being for the ill-fated battle rifle. One of the most blatant overtures of Ares cozying up to their new dance partner came in the form of Damien Knight getting Chuck Rascome vetted as an Ares's Corporate Court justice. Rascome had been a lawyer, lobbyist, and occasional politician in the CAS circuit, and Knight putting one of their citizens in the Big Courtroom in Space was a bold step.

- Didn't Chuck run for CAS prez one year? I think he was on some small-party ticket.
- Kay St. Irregular

- For the record, Rascome is now officially an Ares citizen. Only citizens of the represented corp can be vetted as CC justices.
- Cosmo

- Yeah, but I'm sure he's still got plenty of friends and family down in Atlanta.
- Hard Exit

- Isn't that the idea?
- Kay St. Irregular

One of the more interesting—or tragic, depending on your point of view—outcomes of Ares's falling out with the UCAS is that the board is seriously considering relocating its HQ from Detroit to Atlanta. The UCAS is fighting against this move in every way it can, including taking the war to the shadows, because the departure of a AAA mega and all of its many citizens from Motor City would gut the city's economy. On the other hand, Atlanta is looking forward to an influx of new Ares citizens and all of the money they'll bring with them. In essence, the UCAS and CAS are in a bidding war over Ares's future, and whichever deal works more in the corp's favor is the one the board will ultimately choose. But smart nuyen is on Atlanta: it's stupid to stay in a neighborhood where you know you're not really wanted.

- That's what Ares people would like you to think—or at least, that's what they'd like UCAS officials to think. UCAS and Ares are so tightly bound, though, despite all the recent problems, that it's tough to see the nation getting outbid. They'll do what it takes to keep them, even if it means helping them move to another city in the nation.
- Sunshine

- I understand land is available in Chicago. Certainly some of Ares's newer executives would be interested in that location …
- Mr. Bonds

CULTURE

As I said before, the foundation for understanding how Ares works is to have a firm grounding of the way militaries work. Militaries—the successful ones, at least—focus on strong top-down leadership, clear communication, efficient practices, self-reliance, and constant training. The only major difference is that Ares tends to wage war with nuyen rather than ordnance.

As a megacorp founded in the former United States, Ares takes its cultural cues from North American/UCAS society. Ares corporate leadership constantly reinforces the ideas that each employee, be it a division head or a lowly intern hoping to earn corporate citizenship, has the drive and wherewithal to excel and "be all that you can be." Leadership also encourages employees to embody the three official Ares values: hard work, family, and security.

Hard work is motivated by performance reviews and commendations not unlike military decorations. Just like in the real military, promotions are based largely on merit, although a fair amount of office politics can still factor in. After surviving the first six months of basic training, an intern—a "private" in office lingo—is automatically promoted to a full employee/citizen—a private first class, if you will—but beyond that, the number of available positions become more and more scarce. This results in an increasingly competitive work environment

ARES OFFICE SLANG

Billet: Job posting
Boot: Initial employee training
Brass: Board of directors
Brigade: Subsidiary (e.g., Ares Arms)
C&C: Command and Control, corporate HQ in Detroit
Casualty: Former Ares employee/citizen
CO: Immediate boss/manager
Colonel: Subsidiary/division head
Corps: Regional division (e.g., Ares Africa)
Court-martialed: Fired
Engagement: Meeting
Enlistment Period: term of employment
MRE: Lunch
NCO: Team lead
Pogue/POG: Person Other than Grunt. Middle-manager
Private: Intern
PT: Mandatory training courses
Theater: Area overseen by a regional division (e.g., the South American theater)
Top Kick: Senior project manager

that encourages employees to work harder, if not necessarily smarter.

Family is demonstrated by a general esprit de corps shared across the whole corp. Though Ares employees don't see themselves as a somewhat literal family in the same sense that Shiawase or Horizon citizens do, they all espouse the notion of "We're all in this together." So while some notable rivalry exists between the different divisions and subsidiaries, it acts more like the one-upmanship between siblings, much how the UCAS Navy and Marine Corps still take jabs of opportunity at each other despite them both fighting for the same side. Rivalries aside, Ares employees are staunchly devoted to the corp. A good part of what makes Ares all one big happy family is that everyone goes through the same kind of training regimens, which are often harsher than the kind of "motivation" a military drill instructor hammers into recruits. Outsiders might view this as a form of indoctrination or brainwashing, but the corp benefits by having everyone feel like they've all crawled through the same trenches together.

- The takeaway here is if someone offers you a job to extract an Ares employee, odds are the target isn't going to go willingly or quietly.
- Sticks

Security, in terms of the buzzword on the company's mission statement, means a lot of different things, depending on whom you ask, what the employee's job is, and what tier in the corporate hierarchy they sit. The overall corporate ideal is akin to national security, both for Ares itself and its "home" nation, which—for the moment—is the UCAS. This means the corp fiercely guards its extraterritorial borders on the physical, astral, and digital planes and often lends troops to its bordering nation where necessary. Upper leadership also focuses on operational security (OPSEC), which in office parlance means protecting trade secrets, hiding hostile moves from competitors, masking military maneuvers, and so forth. For the average peon, though, security is a more personal thing. Ares employees value security in terms of fiscal and job security. Many labor under the impression that, should their position or department ever be eliminated, the beneficent Ares will find some other use of their talents rather than revoke their citizenship and kick them to the curb.

- I'm guessing the whole brainwashing thing doesn't prevent Ares from actually showing someone the door.
- Axis Mundi

- One thing Cosmo left out from this section is that Ares employees have become increasingly paranoid of late. Ever since Young Nick bought it, there's been this undercurrent of people always looking over their shoulders, being distrustful of new faces, and so on. It's as if they think everyone they meet might actually be a flesh form bug spirit.
- Sticks

- Or maybe the paranoid employees are the flesh forms ...
- Axis Mundi

TABLE OF ORGANIZATION

Before a major restructuring effort following Crash 2.0 and the acquisition of Cross Applied Technologies, Ares was organized—and I use that term loosely—in an inefficient, bureaucratic rat's nest. A subsidiary reported to the closest regional division rather than to its functional division, which in turn reported to Ares HQ in Detroit. For example, Ares Global Entertainment's HQ is in Paris, which fell under the jurisdiction of Ares Europe, located in Copenhagen, and Copenhagen then reported to Detroit. To tangle the web even further, some subsidiaries, such as Knight Errant or Ares Space, were treated as autonomous entities that reported directly to Detroit, and Ares Arms had become large enough to establish its own regional divisions.

The restructuring effort made a host of sweeping changes. Each of the functional divisions—Arms, Heavy Industry, Aerospace, Services, Consumer Products,

etc.—now reports to Ares Global Holding in Detroit. The regional divisions—North America, South America, North Europe, South Europe, Middle East, Africa, Asia-Pacific—also report to Detroit but they focus more on infrastructure, logistics, and local strategies. The sole exception to this reorganization is Knight Errant, which still reports directly to Ares Global Holding rather than Ares Services.

At first many mid-level execs fought these organizational changes, since the restructuring would remove a great deal of power from their hands. However, the Excalibur-caused financial crisis and Horizon's disaster-recovery advice saw many of the most vocal Ares dissidents either forcibly replaced or retired (or "retired," in at least one case that I know of). The rest relented or made plans to defect to another company.

Now that the restructuring is complete, Ares's corporate hierarchy has resulted in a leaner, meaner, and more effective machine ready to spring back into the intercorporate fray.

PERSONNEL

More than ever, the people running Ares, from the boardroom down to the lowliest regional manager, are invested in seeing the corp flourish in the wake of recent financial and reputational hardship. What follows are some of the most influential people committed to Ares's success, but bear in mind that each one has their own version of what that entails.

COMMANDING OFFICERS

The people sitting in the Ares Global Holding boardroom in Detroit hold the most power in the corporation. All of the major decisions affecting the corp's future come from them.

DAMIEN KNIGHT

The most visible figurehead of Ares Macrotechnology, Damien Knight is a power player and a celebrity with

worldwide renown. He might look like a smug, trim, and athletic thirty-something, but don't let that façade fool you. Knight's appearance has changed very little since his appearance on the global scene in 2033. Only a touch of distinguished gray at the temples—which many claim to be an affectation rather than natural greying—and an ability to walk in broad daylight without UV protection has demonstrated that the man *probably* isn't an HMHVV-infected vampire. Tabloids might claim he made a deal with the devil for his youthfulness, but he likely just undergoes enough regular léonization treatments to take the age off. In recent months, though, we've been starting to see some noticeable frown lines and forehead wrinkles, which lends even more confirmation to the léonization rumors. Due to the process involving gene therapy, Knight probably put his sessions on hold due to genetech being a potential vector for CFD virus transmission.

- Those age lines started showing up around the same time the gene- and nanotech divisions of BacteriTech and Ares Integrated Solutions got shuttered. Coincidence? I don't think so.
- Nephrine

- The age lines are because he's probably pushing on eight decades old, and léonization is basically just slapping a bandage on a wound that will never actually heal. No one can cheat death forever.
- Butch

- Except for maybe e-ghosts.
- Icarus

- Or elves. Some of them, at least.
- Frosty

- I can't speak for the rest of you, but *I* plan on being immortal.
- Slamm-0!

The real question, though, is who exactly *is* Damien Knight? There are no records of him existing before Crash 1.0 in 2029. On one hand, the Crash *did* frag a lot of records, but that excuse only gets you so far. The overriding theory is that Knight is actually one David Gavilan, a member of the brave Echo Mirage decker team that risked their lives to bring down the Crash virus.

- Ugh, people are still harping on the idea that Knight was some hero for the whole metahuman race? Listen up. Aside from a few lucky folks, most of Echo Mirage ended up flatlined, vegetabled, or insane. The only "proof" of the Knight–Gavilan connection is a blurry snapshot of a guy who sorta looks like a young Knight, wearing a uniform with "GAVILAN" on the nametape. Such an easy thing to fake, even back then. You ask me, Knight "leaked" the whole David Gavilan theory just so he'd add some mystique to his already considerable fame.
- 2XL

- If he's not Gavilan, then who is he?
- Glitch

- Someone with potential ties to great dragons, is who. No way could Knight have pulled off the Nanosecond Buyout alone. The same day Knight snapped up all of his shares, Gavilan Ventures also acquired twelve percent ownership of the corp. And who owned Gavilan before shuffling off his mortal coil? Fragging *Dunkelzahn*. Don't tell me that's coincidence.
- 2XL

- Knight making a deal with a dragon to gain a combined ownership of more than a third of the whole corp either sounds foolhardy or genius. What I'd like to know is, how did he convince Dunkelzahn to let him have a larger piece of the pie?
- Axis Mundi

If Knight is really as old as David Gavilan should be, that would explain his propensity to lean more on physical and digital technology instead of magic. With the Awakening turning sixty-six years old, come December, most people alive today were born into a world with magic. Not everybody understands spirits and sorcery, but they are facts of life in the Sixth World. Only people older than sixty-six have memories of living in a completely mundane world, and many of these older folks have a deep-seated distrust of anything magical. Now, Ares *does* employ magicians; for example, every Knight Errant FireWatch team includes at least one spellslinger. This simply means Knight has more faith in a bullet or in his rumored discreet augmentations than he does in a spell or spirit.

Regardless of his beliefs in technology, Damien Knight is both an egomaniac and a megalomaniac, which makes him both successful and dangerous. He has been on one nonstop power trip since the day he bought his way into Ares's boardroom, and it doesn't stop with Ares. Knight acts like he knows what's best for everyone, and he knows how to whisper into all the right ears and grease all the right palms with both money and promises. For more than four decades, he's had the UCAS and several smaller nations eating right out of his hand—following his policy advice, awarding Ares big contracts, and so on. However, the corp's recent falling out with UCAS has put Knight's power trip onto a detour, so I'd expect to see something drastic happen in the near future. Anything from Knight forcing a regime change in the UCAS to Ares moving its HQ to Atlanta could be in the cards.

The thing to keep in mind about Damien Knight is that he is a shark wearing a business suit, and there's plenty of chum in the water. He's outsmarted or outlived most of his rivals and enemies. Get on his bad side, you might find yourself outsmarted too.

- Don't know if anyone else has noticed, but Knight's been acting really weird lately. Canceling public appearances, refusing interviews—that sort of thing. Wouldn't be surprised if he was replaced with a flesh form—or has been a flesh form all this time.
- Plan 9

- Or maybe he got CFD from his léonization treatments and is a head case now?
- Clockwork

- To be honest, neither of those options sound appealing.
- Butch

ARTHUR VOGEL

Vogel, a dwarf in his early sixties, owns the largest controlling interest in Ares. He is also the executive director of Ares and holds the office of treasurer of Ares Global Holding. Where he got the kind of money needed to buy up nearly a full fourth of Ares, though, is a mystery, and many wonder if he is merely a puppet dancing on someone else's strings. Before joining the board, he was an eco-lawyer with ties to the activist group Sierra Inc., and he ran in the 2057 UCAS presidential race against Dunkelzahn. Vogel has since taken the corp to task in an effort to make Ares as green and environmentally friendly as possible. (Most of the measures he's introduced can be easily ignored or sidestepped, but it's the thought that counts.)

- The saying goes that once execs reach a certain pay scale, they have their conscience surgically removed. So where'd this guy's come from?
- Slamm-0!

- It's obviously not a real conscience.
- Snopes

Vogel had a close relationship with Young Nick Aurelius, which, much to Knight's chagrin, often allowed him to influence Nick's votes. Many speculate that Knight's rivalry was the real culprit for the assassination attempt that nearly claimed Vogel's life at the LA Environmental Summit in 2071, but others speculate that Vogel's failure to make Ares truly eco-friendly despite his years of campaigning on environmentalists' behalf earned him enemies of a different sort.

He spent several years recuperating at Ares's *Daedalus* station and chose to remain there even after receiving a clean bill of health. However, recent news indicates that Vogel has come down from his perch in the sky and returned to visit us mere mortals for awhile. Speculation remains rampant regarding his earthside agenda, but since the assassination attempt, Vogel has developed somewhat of an obsession with the technology behind the augmentations that kept him alive and mobile. Market watchers are anticipating new announcements regarding Ares's cyber- and bioware product lines.

LEONARD AURELIUS

The new/old kid on the block, Young Nick's father is back in the boardroom and has an axe to grind regarding his original exit from the corp and the subsequent dismantling of Cross. Leonard votes in a way consistent with what he believes is the best course of action for the corporation his father built.

Most of the projects in Nick's wheelhouse transferred to Leonard, and a good many of those got downsized, repurposed, or shuttered. Whatever Leonard's ultimate agenda is within the corp, you can bet he'll vote down any measure that has anything to do with researching insect spirits, unless it's about killing them with impunity. No more of this Project Pyro, fight-fire-with-fire nonsense. Leonard wants someone to pay for his son's death, and bugs are at the top of his list.

Rumor has it that he is trying to find some way to buy up some of Gavilan Ventures' shares rather than remain their proxy, but the collapse of Cross left him bankrupt (or at least nearly). Where he would get the money to follow through with such a plan is anyone's guess.

- If I did the math right, Leonard's gotta be about the same age as Knight—or older. Why doesn't he just let Ares go and find a beach resort somewhere where they put paper umbrellas in the drinks?
- Chainmaker

- Lenny at least looks his age. Wouldn't take more than harsh language to send that old codger into cardiac arrest.
- 2XL

POGUES

In military slang, pogues or "Persons Other than Grunts," are rear-echelon leaders who rarely have to do any of the "real" work that your average grunt is forced to endure. In Ares, this pejorative term translates roughly to mid- to high-level managers who are out of touch with the work of the average Ares wageslave.

The following pogues wield considerable power within the megacorp.

DANIEL TRUMAN

Truman, former head of the once-Chicago-based Truman Technologies, is one of those guys who people

seem surprised has survived for this long. The media magnate was one of the few VIPs Ares was able to evacuate from Chicago back in 2055, before the quarantine went up, and Damien Knight even helped him set up shop in LA. Without the rescue and fiscal support, Truman would've been dead or bankrupt long ago. Of course, Knight's help always comes with a price, which came in the form of Truman Tech ultimately being subsumed into Ares Global Entertainment and rechristened the Truman Distribution Network.

Truman's seemingly unshakable loyalty to Knight didn't quite pay off like he'd expected. He'd had his sights set on the big chair of AGE, a position he felt uniquely qualified for, so he didn't take it well when Troy Carpenter was named VP instead. The sale of TDN to Horizon was likely Truman's way of getting revenge, but since he didn't defect to Horizon after the sale, odds are he still owns a considerable amount of stock in TDN, despite remaining with Ares. Knight has to know on some level that Truman was responsible for Horizon's TDN takeover, so why he keeps a traitor like Truman around in any capacity is anyone's guess. (My bet is on the old "keep your enemies closer" adage.)

These days Truman remains secluded in some undisclosed location, and pretty much all of his communication with the rest of TDNs leadership occurs via the Matrix. This seclusion has, of course, led to rampant speculation running the gamut of bug spirits, HMHVV infection, a cover-up of his death, and so on. The last time he was spotted in meatspace, he looked like death warmed over, so maybe his hermitage is all for the best.

- There's talk that Truman somehow arranged the meeting that ultimately got Ares and Horizon in bed together. How he managed to orchestrate that while remaining a meatspace hermit and not being on Knight's good side is beyond me.
- Sunshine

- Kinda makes one wonder exactly how deep he and Horizon go these days. Did he essentially offer Ares's head to Horizon's chopping block?
- Dr. Spin

- Possibly. Once you invite a vampire inside your house, you'll have one hell of a time trying to get rid of them.
- Sunshine

MICHELE BORDEN

How Michele Borden got vetted as a Corporate Court justice is a total mystery, assuming you discount nepotism. Though the California-native elf maintains a professional bearing and shows her impressive oratory skills when delivering CC rulings to affected parties, she was clearly underqualified for the job when it was given to her. She and Arthur Vogel were once colleagues at Sierra Inc., but her lack of high-level legal experience there couldn't have been enough to qualify her for a seat on the CC. Maybe Detroit desired a certain level of naïveté in the nominee, so that they would have far better control over her decisions than they did Paul Graves, Borden's predecessor. My favorite possible explanation is that Vogel and Borden have had a longstanding affair since the Sierra Inc. days, but Vogel spending his time at Daedalus and Michele refusing to go Z-O due to her acute space sickness pokes plenty of holes in that idea. (On the other hand, Vogel's recent return to Earth might be an attempt to rekindle those flames. You never know.)

Nowadays, Borden seems to have found firm footing in her CC seat. No longer the naïve, inexperienced doormat she once was, she has begun acting on her own merits rather than directly following the agendas of the Ares board. Rumors also say she has cozied up to Emma Binghampton, Horizon's justice, via the Matrix, which leads many to think that Borden is more willing to judge in favor of Horizon for cases that would drastically affect Horizon's bottom line either directly or indirectly. If true, then Horizon effectively has two voices on the court. If Borden isn't careful, she could find herself recalled and replaced, just like Graves.

CLAYTON WILSON

About four decades ago, Clayton Wilson was head honcho of Lone Star, but his brother and Lone Star's board had the *cojones* to kick him out of the corp entirely. Wilson developed a friendship with Damien Knight over the years, and his experience with law enforcement made him a natural choice for Knight to install as the head of Knight Errant in the wake of Roger Soaring-Owl's abrupt departure in 2071. (If one also considers that many believe Knight created KE as a direct response to Lone Star, then from a purely political standpoint, this was a brilliant move.)

Wilson has spent the last six years whipping Knight Errant into even better shape than it already was. Where Soaring-Owl played more the part of Damien Knight's rubber-stamping yes-man, Wilson runs KE with a far more cowboy attitude, a shoot-first, take-no-prisoners approach both in KE's boardroom and on the streets. So far it's been effective, especially when comparing the difference in success rates between Lone Star's law-enforcement tenure in Seattle, which expired in 2072, and Knight Errant's. While no police force, privatized or otherwise, is infallible, Wilson's direction of KE's takeover of Seattle law enforcement has resulted in a slight uptick of arrest numbers, a lower incidence of officer hospitalizations and deaths, and lower property damage values. Knight has been extraordinarily happy with those results, so he's been willing to overlook Wilson's go-getter attitude—for the moment.

- With Wilson helming KE, how hard would it be for Ares to snatch up Lone Star, hostile takeover style, and absorb its assets into KE? I can imagine that Clayton would love to see the look on his brother's face when he essentially gets kicked out of the company he kicked Clayton out of.
- Hard Exit

DIVISIONS

As mentioned earlier, Ares is structured into regional divisions and functional divisions. The regional divisions, which are sometimes called "theaters of operation," aren't as important to the overall scope of the company: they don't really make the products, so I won't bore you with them. Instead, here's a look at all of the functional industries—the different corps, if you will—that make up the heart and soul of Ares Macrotechnology.

ARES ARMS

The most recognizable Ares division worldwide, Ares Arms manufactures and distributes just about any weapon system and accompanying paraphernalia you can imagine. Guns, swords, tanks, more guns, military drones, ammunition, even more guns, cyberware weapons, electronic warfare tools, weapon accessories—you name it, and Ares Arms makes at least one model of it (but a dozen different models is more likely) and is actively trying to sell it to anyone and everyone who has either an axe to grind or something to protect.

Less known but just as important is Ares Arms's military consulting services. Military specialists, usually former high-ranking officers from Ares or the UCAS's armed forces, are hired out to anyone in need of military advice or to act as a soldiery liaison between hired mercenaries and official armed forces. Clients range from established governments wishing to implement new defense programs or fledgling governments, rising dictatorships, or newly rated AA corps needing to organize and train a standing army. Also, a surprising number of Desert Wars commanders secretly employ Ares military strategists to supplement their tactical capabilities.

Before the Excalibur debacle happened, Ares Arms had the most power overall in the megacorp. It brought in the most revenue and global prestige, so what was good for Ares Arms was good for Ares Macrotechnology. What it asked for, it got, nearly without question. (This is probably part of why the Excalibur—née Project Avalon—failed so spectacularly: no one bothered to see where a lot of the money Ares Arms asked for was being used.) Nowadays, though, all projects and budget requests are ratified by the board of directors, and the subsidiary itself remains in full damage-control mode. R&D for new products has been put on hold, and marketing is focusing on accentuating staid product lines to remind consumers of Ares foundation of reliability. What that means is don't expect to see anything wholly new weapons from Ares Arms until people start forgetting the M-256 Battle Rifle was ever released. And even then, expect to see Ares Arms release subtle variations of extant models at first rather than brand-new models.

- I guess that means not to expect a Predator VI any time soon?
- Goat Foot

- Though technically obsolete tech, my plain-vanilla Predator still works just fine.
- Sticks

ARES CONSUMER PRODUCTS

The Ares Consumer Products division covers a plethora of different products that don't fit in neatly with Ares's other functional divisions. We're talking a kitchen-sink approach here, both figuratively and literally. Consumer electronics, cyber and bio augmentations, biomedical products, fashion lines, financial services, software development, toaster ovens, loofahs, finishing nails, and, yes, even kitchen sinks—the list goes on. It's not quite an Aztechnology-level breadth of consumer-product offerings, but it's getting there. New product lines tend to result from any halfway successful military or aerospace product whose technology or applications can be easily adapted or repurposed for civilian use. For example, countless everyday technologies from the pre-Crash 1.0 era, such as cordless appliances and prosthetic limbs, came from the late twentieth-century space race, and we can thank the militaries of yore for things like GPS, duct tape, and microwave ovens. So when you see something wholly new from Ares Consumer Products, it's safe to assume it began life as something for the battlefields or microgravity environments.

- What possible military or aerospace application could Ares Diaper Paste have had?
- Slamm-0!
- Use your imagination.
- Picador

Ares is pushing ads for this division into people's AR overlays harder than ever before in hopes of trying to erase some of the recent damage by increasing product awareness and restoring some goodwill and customer confidence. Another strategy has been the rebranding effort spearheaded by Horizon. Although the rebranding affected most Ares divisions with at least a light touch, the rebranded lines of even popular ACP products are almost unrecognizably different from their original incarnation. Also, as part of the deal with Horizon, many new Ares products include or have ties to companion Horizon products. For example, that fancy new Ares-made commlink might come preloaded with a Horizon-developed OS or a program suite, or the Ares trideo set that suggests subscribing to Horizon channel packages alongside AGE offerings.

- The more I read about this partnership agreement with Horizon, the more it sounds like Ares got imperially screwed by this deal.
- Sticks

- It was either that or risk losing its AAA rating, its two seats on the Corporate Court, et cetera. And plus, the Horizon channels are kinda nice.
- Pistons

ARES HEAVY INDUSTRY

Automotive, aquatic, and mining ventures all fall under the aegis of Ares Heavy Industry. General Motors is perhaps the most recognizable brand from an average consumer standpoint, but AHI turns more profit from its automotive and aquatic military programs and from the manufacture and sales of heavy mining equipment than it does from its civilian automotive lines. This puts AHI in direct competition with the heavy industry concerns of Saeder-Krupp and Shiawase, so expect to see plenty of available runs from this sector, either for or against AHI.

A healthy amount of nanotech-driven manufacturing and research also fell under AHI, mostly under the Ares Integrated Solutions umbrella, but those programs were halted and later shuttered permanently when nanotech was revealed to be one of the transmission vectors for the as-yet incurable CFD virus.

ARES SERVICES

Ares Services is probably best known for Ares Global Entertainment and security providers like Hard Corps and Wolverine, but most of the subsidiary's more profitable offerings either occur behind the scenes or ar-

en't marketed directly to the average consumers. For example, all distribution and logistics concerns for the whole of Ares Macrotechnology are handled by Ares Services, and though an individual can ship something via Mercury Express or Qantas, the larger portion of business comes from serving smaller AA- and A-rated corps that lack their own robust logistical apparatus. Likewise, Ares-branded banking services offer loans to individuals and small businesses, but their real bread and butter comes from loans and services to other corporations.

Ares Services's internal and business-to-business nature in addition to its further remove from guns, bugs, or nanotech, meant the recent woes of Ares proper left the subsidiary relatively untouched, either by bad reputation or by Horizon's rebranding strategies. If it ain't broke ....

The current head of AGE, Troy Carpenter, has his eye set on helming the entire division. With Daniel Truman withdrawing from public eye, Carpenter will likely have little opposition from the former media mogul.

ARES GLOBAL ENTERTAINMENT

AGE, arguably the most important branch of Ares Services, is vital to the new face of Ares, so I felt it deserved its own special mention.

If you want something to pass the time, Ares Global Entertainment has got just the thing for you—or so their marketing arm would have you believe. Anything from trid shows, news broadcasts, sim chips, music downloads, Matrix games, books, propaganda—pick your poison and your keywords, and AGE either already has it available or it's currently in production.

Detroit's mandate for AGE is simple: make the Ares brand look good, at any cost. In practice, this has resulted in various forms of media smearing AGE's competitors. However, in the wake of Ares's recent troubles, AGE—specifically via its news outlets such as NBS—has become the official mouthpiece for all of the marketing and rebranding advice that has resulted from Ares's begrudging partnership with Horizon. The downside to the deal, though, is that AGE is no longer allowed to badmouth Horizon over the air. No word on how long this deal will remain in effect.

As part of this positive-spin campaign, AGE seems to have resorted to embedding subliminal programming into various newsfeeds, Matrix offerings, and simsense recordings. According to rumor, consumers tend to feel better about both Ares *and* Horizon after being exposed to the messages, so *caveat emptor*.

- Took me a while, but I managed to confirm this. I dissected one of AGE's latest offerings, the trid movie Le Risque Files: Consorting with Trouble, and the programming seems to be embedded as a single-use executable, depending on the media type. You watch/listen/experience it, then the executable runs and immediately self-destructs. Then there's no trace that the goods were ever tainted to begin with, and you walk away with a sense that you haven't stopped at Weapons World in a while.
- Glitch

- Aw, man. The Risque Files is one of my favorite foreign series.
- Slamm-0!

- Damn. Then you've probably already been compromised.
- Netcat

- On the other hand, there's no such thing as "too many guns."
- Slamm-0!

- Best of luck to them on this, but research on the effectiveness of subliminal messaging is not as encouraging as I'm sure they'd like.
- Dr. Spin

ARESSPACE

Despite all of the financial and reputational hardships suffered by Ares proper, AresSpace unquestionably stands at the top of the aerospace industry. Though other AAAs such as Saeder-Krupp and Evo offer stiff competition, Ares dominates the space race by a notable margin. Their leg up on other megas started with the acquisition of NASA in the post-Crash 1.0 days and evolved into space salvage and telecommunications enterprises.

Today AresSpace focuses on microgravity research and manufacturing; global communications services; satellite-based global weather and geological analysis; and space tourism. AresSpace also maintains a plethora of space stations. These include six habitats in Earth orbit, such as *Apollo* and *Icarus*; the *Nimbus* orbital shipyards; the *Daedalus* station/factory at Earth's L4 Lagrange point; the *Helios* solar observatory at the L3 Lagrange point, and the *Charon* station at one the L1 Lagrange point of the Martian moon Deimos. In addition, AresSpace owns the completed Artemis Lunar Arcology, and construction is well underway on an as-yet unnamed station near Phobos that is expected to be completed by 2079.

One of the more recent AresSpace developments involved Arthur Vogel deciding to scrap all microgravity research being conducted with nanotechnology. When Evo lost contact with its Gagarin base on Mars earlier this year and AresSpace lost contact with *Charon* a few months later, a localized outbreak of the CFD virus was implicated. Though Ares managed to recover *Charon*, the board voted to scrap all potential CFD vectors in space, as a preventive security measure against further catastrophic loss.

- Everybody's blaming CFD for everything these days. Has it really gotten that bad?
- Pistons

- Head cases make for a convenient scapegoat. And most of the time, the accusations aren't wrong.
- Clockwork

- Won't somebody think of the poor nanites?
- Slamm-0!

KNIGHT ERRANT SECURITY SERVICES

Those of you who run the Seattle shadows probably best know Knight Errant as the fuzz, but this autonomous subsidiary tackles so much more than just municipal law-enforcement contracts. KE first came onto the stage of capitalism as a top-tier security firm specializing in corporate and real-estate security, but the outfit quickly branched out. Now corporations and governments can hire KE for—to quote the AR sales brochure—"urban crisis management" (dealing with civil unrest, disaster relief, martial law, and so on), "special forces operations" (KE-branded SWAT teams and such), and "counterinsurgency campaigns" (counter-revolutionaries, for all your rebellion-squashing needs).

Unlike your standard mercenary outfits, KE focuses on low-intensity warfare, so don't expect to be seeing them in Desert Wars. For the really tough nuts, though, KE brings out FireWatch, elite special-forces teams of cybered-to-the-gills soldiers and veteran combat magicians. These days, FireWatch is mostly famous for clearing out insect spirit hives—and for fragging the pooch big time during the Chicago bug crisis. Ares-owned news services cover hive cleaning as though FireWatch is the savior of metahumanity.

- If a FireWatch team is involved in something—regardless of who they're aiming at—some major drek is about to go down.
- Sticks

Since Clayton Wilson was put in charge of KE, some aspects of the subsidiary have taken on a slight Lone Star flavor, mostly in the law enforcement division. KE police officers don't go around wearing Stetsons or riding spurs or anything, but since Soaring-Owl's departure, the "Knights" have adopted a more aggressive stance with criminals and are more apt to use lethal force than nonlethal takedown methods. Some see this subtle culture shift as a purposeful effort to ease the Seattle police transition from Lone Star to KE; others simply call bullying for what it is.

WAR IN THE SHADOWS

At some point in their career, people who run the shadows, especially in North America, tend to end up working at least one job connected to Ares. If you want to make the big scores while preferably keeping all the unwanted holes out of your body, here's some things to bear in mind.

RUNNING FOR ARES

There's lots of conflicting opinions about running the shadows when Ares is footing the bill. Case in point, I remember an ancient Shadowland post that said Ares jobs tend to have the highest survivability rate, whereas some obsolete JackPoint post drekked all over that parade by saying most Ares jobs are essentially suicide missions, and the odds you'll get geeked taking one are pretty fragging high. Then there are the veteran runners who claim Ares has never sold them out, while others regularly spill some alcohol in the memory of a friend lost because their Ares Johnson "forgot" to mention some important detail. Whose story should you believe? The trick is to take any tale of an Ares run with a grain of sodium chloride. On average, Ares jobs are no safer than any other mega's jobs, and they're not necessarily any more dangerous either. This means you're best off evaluating each Ares-backed job with caution. Are you more liable to get killed taking Ares's coin? Not necessarily. Are you more liable to get *shot*? Absolutely, especially if you're asked to field-test some new hardware or if the job comes directly from Ares Arms rather than a less gun-crazy subsidiary.

Survivability concerns aside, one of the big perks of running for Ares is they tend to partially pay runners with weapons or equipment in addition to nuyen or scrip. This includes those (expensive) prototypes you might be asked to field test. (Although, given the flak the Excalibur has gotten, runners are less liable to accept prototype field-testing gigs, and Ares is less liable to offer them.) Just don't get caught pawning said prototype, or you might find yourself on the business end of the production-model version of said equipment.

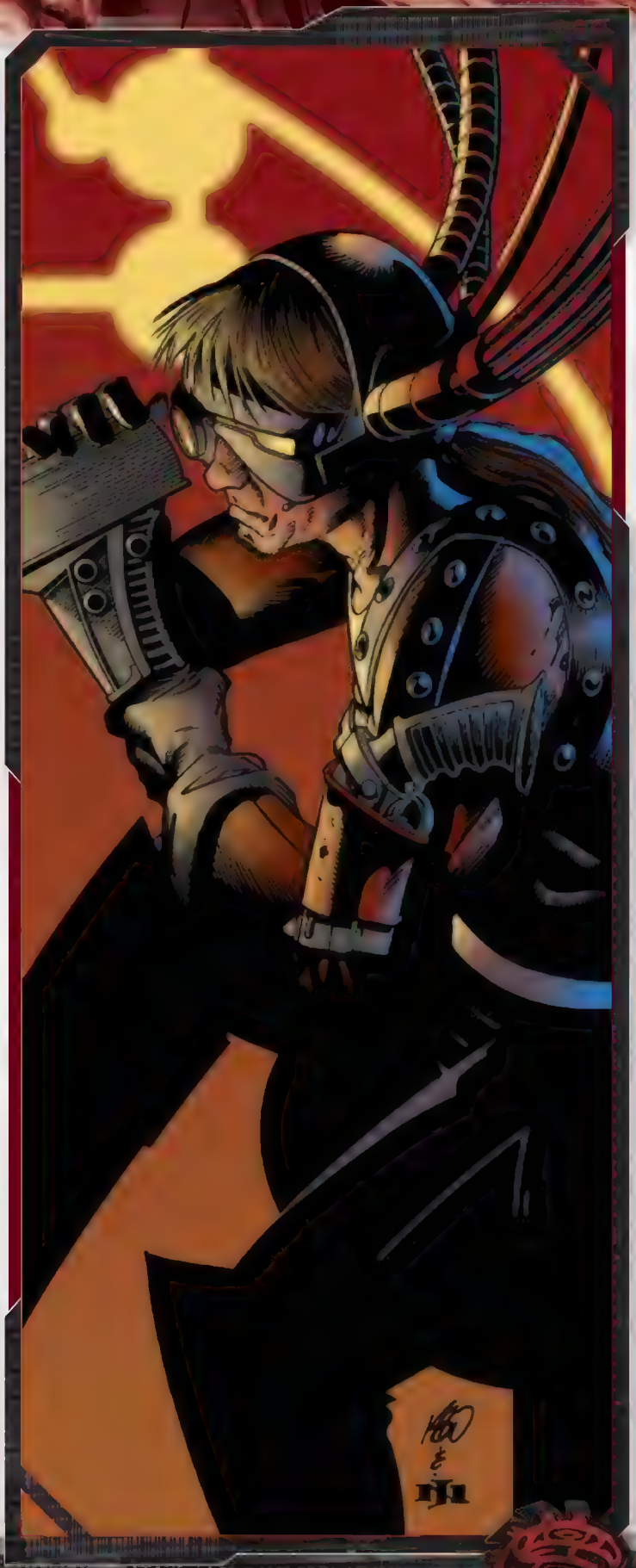
If you're wondering whether your Johnson works for Ares, remember they love to speak in terms of "targets" and "missions" and "objectives," which should surprise no one, considering that the vast majority of mid- to high-level Johnsons come from military backgrounds. Don't let all this snappy military discipline dictate how you do the job, though. Some runners—you know who you are—thrive on loose but careful execution rather than a do-it-*now* mentality. Rushing an Ares job as probably a good way to get yourself killed. On the other hand, taking too long can cause problems too, especially for jobs with discrete timetables. All depends on the

job. The trick, though, is walking that fine line between doing the job the way the Ares "recruiter" thinks you should and doing the job *right*. Once you strip away the Johnson's military façade, all that matters are tangible results, and results are what gets you paid.

RUNNING AGAINST ARES

One of the crucial things to remember when crossing swords with Ares is that the corp *knows* weapons. Doesn't matter what Ares subsidiary you're hitting: expect the security to be armed to the teeth and sporting the latest-model Ares Arms weaponry. Those questionable survivability tales I mentioned about running *for* Ares? Well, when running *against* Ares, they're all true, for the most part. You know the target will be well armed, and if you don't prepare accordingly, then it was nice knowing you. *Sayonara*. *Auf Wiedersehen*.

In addition to watching out for state-of-the-art weapons tech, just hope the job you're working isn't so sensitive a target that you run into Ares's biggest guns. Though Cross was dismantled, Ares retained their elite Seraphim operatives, and if you believe rumors, Damien Knight's got a whole roster of powerful initiate-level magicians at his beck and call, known as the Unseen. Other opposition might consist of whole FireWatch teams or the many, many runner groups Ares contracts. Ares loves their shadowrunners, so odds are high that you could end up pointing guns or spells at someone you know and consider a chummer. In that case, I hope your professionalism holds up, because your chummer is probably being paid really, really well to shoot at you with some shiny new hardware.



AZTECHNOLOGY

"Please, Mr. Vile. I'm not going to slice your neck and drain your blood. How cliché."

Vic Vile didn't know if Mr. Johnson thought he was being funny with the "Mr. Vile" line, and he didn't much care. He needed to get out of this basement office, find the rest of his team members (who had just skipped out on him) and slowly murder each and every one of them. Mr. Johnson's sense of humor was the least of his concerns.

"Great. No sacrifice," he said. "Can I go now?"

"In just a moment, yes," Mr. Johnson said, lightly rubbing his Aztec-print jacket lapel with his left hand. "We have one more small matter of debriefing to take care of, and then you will be on your way."

"Is there a reason the rest of my team couldn't be here for this?"

"As a matter of fact there is, and I believe you'll agree with the reason. You were responsible for the route your team took to the target destination?"

"The metaplanar route? Yeah, that was me."

"Which means you would have been responsible for acquiring the necessary clearances the journey would have required, correct?"

Vile grinned. He liked grinning—three jobs ago he had purchased a perfect set of white choppers, and he enjoyed showing them off. "Clearances? It's the metaplanes, pal. Not like you can carry around a passport for someone to stamp. The way I figure it, if you can figure out how to get some place, that's all the authorization you need."

"Did you inform your team that this was your thinking?"

"I didn't inform them of anything. I told them where to go, and they followed."

"So you accept responsibility for the transit of the entire team?"

"Damn right. They wouldn't have gotten anywhere without me."

Mr. Johnson nodded. "Have you heard enough?"

Vic was about to ask who he was talking through when a painting of a sun-dappled forest behind Mr. Johnson abruptly grew in size until it was about the size of a small door. A hairy creature less than a meter tall crawled out around the edge of the frame. It had outrageously bushy eyebrows and a jaw that looked capable of opening wide enough to stretch beyond the height of the creature. When it spoke, it revealed multiple rows of sharp teeth.

"It's enough," the thing said. "He alone can be held to account."

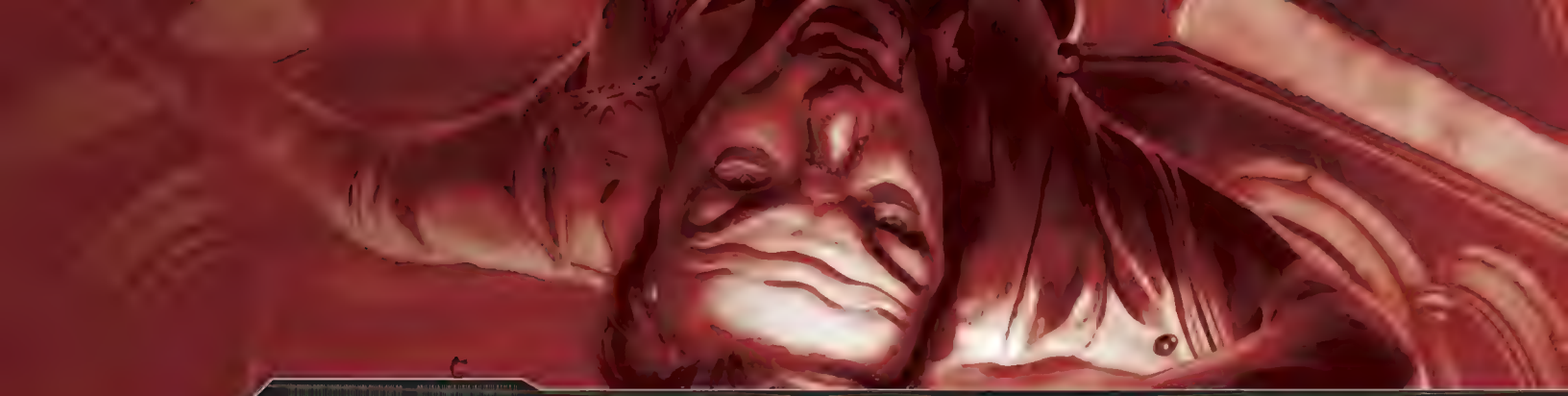
"And relations will continue as they have?"

The creature looked Vic up and down, then nodded. "It seems sufficient. Yes."

"This is bull—" Vic started to say, but then his jaw locked up on him. The creature sauntered across the basement office, then used its long arms to hoist a now-stiff Vic over its shoulders with surprising ease.

Mr. Johnson shook his head as the creature hauled Vic away into the painting. When he spoke, it was mostly to himself.

"I am continually stunned by people who think that draining blood is the only way to perform a sacrifice."



AZTECHNOLOGY

Corporate Court Ranking (2078): #4
Corporate Slogan: "The Way to a Better Tomorrow"
Corporate Status: AAA, private corporation
World Headquarters: Tenochtitlán, Aztlan
President/CEO: Flavia de la Rosa
Major Shareholders: Undisclosed
Major Divisions: Aztechnology North America, Aztechnology Latin America, Aztechnology Europe, Aztechnology Australasia, Aztechnology Africa
Notable Subsidiaries/Brands: Austrafarm (Agribusiness), CEI (Heavy Industry/ Mining), Energia Viva (Energy), Maritech Enterprises (Aquaculture), Nature-Taste (Consumer Goods/ Foodstuffs), Pemex (Oil/Chemicals), Productos Cultivatos (Agribusiness), Carlsberg-Heineken (Foodstuffs/Liquor), Líder (Megamarts), Natural Vat Technologies (Consumer Goods/ Foodstuffs), Stuffer Shack (Convenience Store chain), Trés Chic Cosmetics (Cosmetics), Optical Dreams (Matrix/Simtech), Microtrónica Azteca (Matrix/ Hardware), DhakaSoft (Matrix/ Software), ComPac (Matrix/Software), Channel 12 (Media/ Trid Network), Televisa (Media/Trideo & Simsense Producer), BANCOMEX (Banking/Finance), Corporación Clínica (Hospital Management), Cuerpos Radicales (Health Care/Clinics), Genetique (Biotech/Genetech), Medicarro (Medical Service Provider), Embraer (Aircraft/Miltech), Marine Technologies (Naval), Soluciones Orbitales Integradas (Aerospace), Mystics and Magicks (Arcane Service Provider), Pyramid Arcane Supplies (Magical Goods), Armamentos Murreta (Personal Armament), Dassault (Miltech/Aerospace), Esprit (Miltech/Armament), Hawker-Siddley (Aerospace/Drones), Air Montezuma (Airline), Free Transit Cartage (Shipping), Seguridad Primero (Insurance/Emergency Service Provider), Aztech Shuttle Service (Urban Transport)
Dominant Business Language: Aztlaner Spanish
Secondary Business Languages: English, Nuevo Nahuatlt

FINGERS ON YOUR PULSE

POSTED BY: COSMO

The single most important thing about Aztechnology is a simple fact that is too easy for shadowrunners to forget. But if you don't remember it, any runs you attempt against the Big A are going to be more complicated than they should be, because there will be crucial elements that you are failing to take into account. And that simple fact is:

Aztechnology is universally beloved.

Re-read that sentence as many times as you need to in order to let it sink in. Now, keep in mind that when I say "universally," I do not mean that every single person on the planet adores the living daylights out of Aztechnology. Hualpa has no love for them, and neither does Ghostwalker. Horizon execs are not too thrilled with their chicanery, and we all know how shadowrunners tend to feel about them. What I'm telling you is we need to set those outliers aside, put away our own instinctive reactions, and remember how much the general public loves the Big A. Why? Let's look at some critical reasons:

THEIR PR MACHINE IS WELL-OILED AND SUBTLE

It's been way too easy to overlook the incredible genius of Aztechnology PR ever since Horizon joined the Big Ten. Horizon's PR is impossible to ignore, since it's such a crucial part of what they do and an organic outgrowth of their corporate culture. For the most part, Horizon PR works to reinforce the central Horizon brand, persuading you to enjoy the touchy-feely good vibes they want you to feel. It's a triumph of branding, because when you see a piece of Horizon PR, you *know* it's Horizon PR.

Aztechnology is not like that, and it's possibly all the stronger for it. There is no characteristic house style to Aztechnology PR efforts. Their advertising, their corporate philanthropy, the public appearances of their executives, and so on are not designed to fit a particular mold. They are designed to work with whatever a particular corporation or brand needs. They are designed to be seamless, to not look like obvious PR efforts, but rather to simply appear as part of the normal fabric of an organization's activities. You don't notice it, but it still affects you, whereas Horizon PR is all about being noticed.

Let me illustrate what I'm talking about. After the technomancer massacre in Las Vegas, Horizon went full Horizon. Subsidiaries throughout the corporate chain were blasting out serious-minded messages about the reflection that was needed to prevent such violence from ever occurring again (while not, of course, ever admitting responsibility for anything). They doubled down on their customary message of tolerance and respect for all types of humans and metahumans. They created a new campaign called "Peace on the Horizon" to describe what they would be doing to make a better world, inviting others to join them. And while it certainly didn't heal all wounds, to many observers it made Horizon appear serious about fixing the flaws that led to the technomancer disaster—even though, for all the talk, there was precious little action that actually helped technomancers. Sure, Horizon made some changes in how the Consensus works and how leadership responds to it, but what did they do on behalf of technomancers? Go ahead and ask one.

- Cosmo's implication is pretty clear, but let me spell it out in case you're missing it: They did pretty much nothing.
- Netcat

Now let's look at how Aztechnology dealt with the Azt-Am War. I'll set aside their efforts in Bogotá and within Aztlan for the moment, as those simply follow more conventional war propaganda models. The more interesting thing, to me, is examining is the response across the world. There was no big campaign rallying people to support Aztlan and Aztechnology, or demonize Amazonia. There was no corporate-wide branding about the war. Instead, each subsidiary reacted in a way that was natural. Microtrónica Azteca, which would have considerable difficulty hiding their affiliation with their parent, shared footage of troops using the electronics they produce, focusing on the importance of using communications and information-sharing to stay alive in dangerous situations. They rarely showed Aztlan troops firing their weapons; instead, soldiers were maneuvering through minefields, looking up information on how to deal with dangerous paracritters, or coordinating with each other to escape an ambush in hostile territory. The underlying message was "Our gear keeps front-line troops alive," and it resonated. Meanwhile, Pyramid Arcane Supplies issued excited updates about discoveries Aztlan forces made when wandering deep into the Awakened rainforest, often putting new reagents on sale with days of sharing information about soldiers who stumbled onto a new species of Awakened plant. Dassault had a field day showing its equipment and munitions in action, as did Embraer. Perhaps most interestingly, Nature-Taste, which is not affiliated with Aztechnology in the minds of many consumers, ran a series of commentaries that were almost pro-Amazonia. They talked about the destruction of the rainforest, the burning of agricultural fields, and other activities that might affect the "pure and natural food sources our customers revere." While some Nature-Taste consumers came out of the experience feeling worse about Aztechnology, they felt better about Nature-Taste, which is a tradeoff Aztechnology spin doctors will take every time. As long as you love and purchase their brands, you can dislike whatever you want.

Throughout the megacorporation, Aztechnology places an emphasis on getting good people into communications positions. I guarantee that at least three-quarters of the people reading this subscribe to Stuffer Shack's P2.1 feed, and it's not just because we all love WhompSnappers. It's because the feed is hilarious. When Horizon-owned competitor Naturally Yours was moving into fully owned retail establishments a few years back, they started a "People of Stuffer Shack" social media campaign to sneer at the downscale people who stoop to using everybody's favorite convenience store. Stuffer Shack responded with their own series of images featuring celebrities in de-glamorized wardrobes shopping at Stuffer Shack. They were brilliantly composed, including the one where budding starlet Nina Arrington, dressed in a bathrobe and curlers, is slapping an ork cashier, and one where Concrete Dreams lead guitarist Warren Cartwright is loading the entire contents of the booze case into a wheelbarrow. Stuffer Shack's parody images were more broadly shared than anything Naturally Yours came up with, and subscriptions to Stuffer Shack's feed jumped sharply. They also have a series of "2 a.m. Burrito Koans," released at 2 a.m every morning that are worth staying up for. And damned if they don't make you feel like going out to get a late-night burrito.

- My favorite, a bastardization of Confucius: "Without feelings of respect, what is there to distinguish men from beasts? I mean, besides the fact that they don't season us when they eat us."
- Slamm-0!

The point is, Aztechnology subsidiaries are extremely skilled at knowing their customers and getting them on their side. Their ability to get people to think they are seeing beyond the brand and interacting with real people is a gift.

THEY MAKE THINGS PEOPLE LIKE

It's an obvious point, but it should not be underestimated. Another reason Naturally Yours' "People of Stuffer Shack" campaign didn't work out so well is that most of us are, in fact, people of Stuffer Shack, and we didn't like the implication that there was something wrong with us. Stuffer Shack thrives and grows because we know that we can walk into it at any time of day and get something that will hit us square in some craving or another. Microtrónica makes electronics that are af-

fordable without being bottom-feeding drek. Pyramid Arcane Supplies has top-notch foci and fetishes, and Dasault helps blow things up real good all over the world. There are trusted, reliable brands up and down the Aztechnology structure, and the corp is serious about earning people's loyalty. That has results.

THEY MAKE THEIR GOOD FIGHTS PUBLIC AND KEEP THEIR BAD FIGHTS PRIVATE

This is closely linked to the PR ability, but important enough that I thought it needed its own header. Like any entity with power in the Sixth World, Aztechnology participates in an ongoing series of overlapping conflicts with all sorts of other world powers. We know about many of these (without, of course, knowing the full details) because we help wage them, but the general public is not so privileged. They only know what someone tells them, and Aztechnology is good at getting messages out that they want heard. Ghostwalker is not, by any stretch of the imagination, a popular ruler, so when they take him on directly by seizing a piece of Denver that he does not want them to have, they make sure the story gets out. This is about more than just pushing out stories through Aztechnology-owned media outlets; it's making high-ranking source available to other outlets, and planting sources who seem like neutral third parties but will share pieces of information Aztechnology thinks are important. So it didn't take long for the topic of Aztechnology versus Ghostwalker to be taken up at water coolers across the world, and very few of those conversations involved people expressing strong support for the dragon.

On the other side, when Aztechnology is taking on a more popular opponent, they're good at keeping the story low profile (the Yucatan conflict being one example of when this strategy did *not* work so well). For example, there have been whispers in the shadows about Aztechnology fighting other powers over a mysterious, magic-related discovery in Antarctica. The magic angle brought in the interest of the Draco Foundation, and the two have engaged in some high-powered shadowruns against each other, with plenty of magical fireworks due

to the nature of the information involved. They have done an excellent job of keeping these things out of the public eye, even though some of the conflicts have been explosive enough for outsiders to notice.

- A Pyramid Arcane Services location in St. Louis went up in some pretty spectacular flames recently, and Pyramid addressed it with an interesting and actually pretty funny post called "The Pleasures and Perils of Fire Spirit Research." It's a good read—the arcane information in the article is accurate and informative. Fire spirits had nothing to do with the fire, of course (well, except for the ones unleashed on the facility by Draco-hired runners), but the update hides that quite well.
- Frosty

The Draco Foundation regularly coasts off the goodwill directed toward Dunkelzahn, which means that public would not be thrilled if Aztechnology was trying to break them down. So this conflict will not be pushed hard by Aztechnology, and their reputation will be maintained.

- What if the Draco Foundation decides to talk about it? Couldn't they tell their story?
- Sounder

- Theoretically, yes, but another part of Aztech's savvy comes into play here. This matter is incredibly secretive and seems to involve ways of building truly powerful aspected domains, and the Draco Foundation does not want to have any attention brought to their work here. Aztechnology knows the DF is not eager to talk about this, so as long as they don't talk about it too, the whole affair will stay nice and shadowy.
- Lyran

- "Building truly powerful aspected domains" is an oversimplified and not really accurate description of what's happening here.
- Elijah

- Care to provide a better one?
- Lyran

- It would not be prudent of me to do so.
- Elijah

THEY "GIVE BACK" IN CAREFULLY PLANNED WAYS

While there have been some corporations interested in altruism pretty much as long as there have been corporations, it took until the mid-twentieth century for corporate philanthropy to become a major force, something that most larger corporations did and were expected to do. The giving was very much subject to the whims of economic fortune—leaders would tout giving back to the community as "the right thing to do" right up until profits started looking thin. They would start looking for ways to save money, and reducing the amount of money they gave away was an obvious place to start.

Corporate philanthropy stood on firmer footing in the later twentieth century, as executives figured out how they could engage in the philanthropy the public expected of them while at the same time advancing corporate interests. One simple way of doing this was for a technology company to fund scholarships for technological fields. Students would graduate feeling debt and gratitude to the corporation, and the corporation would have more educated workers to use for their workforce. It's an investment in personnel and training disguised as philanthropy.

Modern-day megacorps do not worry about customer and government approval of their actions quite as much as their twentieth-century equivalents do, but there is still some value to having people think you are using your untold wealth for a good cause. The ways corporations give back nowadays are carefully calculated to look good while bringing back maximum benefits to the corp, and Aztechnology is gifted at this. They partner with governments on environmental clean-up efforts for tracts of land they would like to purchase; their snack-food lines host "healthy living" days for young people, where they can be exposed to athletic and fitness equipment made by other Aztechnology subsidiaries; and they give research grants to mages working on spell formulae that insure any significant discoveries will be usable by the corp. And since people like things like cleaning up pollution, getting athletic equipment, or receiving grants, the Big A looks great to them, all while advancing its own interests. This behavior has its roots in the VITAS crisis, when humanitarian aid provided by the Big A's ancestor helped the corporation build modern-day Aztlan—see the history section for more details.

- This sort of giving is not really nefarious, but it isn't genuine charity, either ("genuine charity" being a concept the Sixth World has little use for). It's charity weaponized for business.
- Dr. Spin

THEIR DARKEST SECRETS ARE WELL AND TRULY BURIED

Think you know the worst of what Aztechnology is up to? You don't. Sure, you may know that they have a thing for blood magic, that they have essentially underwritten bands of vampires and ghouls to help them in this area of research, and that if the *Necronomicon* existed they'd probably just make it part of their employee

handbook, but A) The general public doesn't know any of this stuff; and B) There are worse things than you know happening.

Take Antarctica. Elijah knows what's going on—at least, he knows more than anyone else. He's been pretty cagey about things, but let me ask him a direct question: Elijah, does whatever Aztechnology was up to in Antarctica bode well for the rest of us?

- I'm torn between answering with "bemused chuckle" or "deranged laughter." Perhaps you could take my answer as being a combination of the two?
- Elijah

There's a secret happening down there, and what we don't know has a good chance of killing us. Then we have rumors of Aztlan personnel doing something at Yellowstone. What on Earth are they hanging out there for? Why doesn't the Sioux Nation give them their walking papers?

The answers to all those questions are, "I don't know," and we know enough to know that when that's what you're saying about the Big A's activities, you should quite rightly be terrified. The general public, though, is comfortably insulated by the sheer volume of what they do not know.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BIG A

This unique corporation—the only true national-megacorporate hybrid in the Sixth World (yeah, PCC, I'm not counting you, with your relatively paltry corporate activity)—has also had a unique history, with plenty of events unequaled in the entire corporate history of the Sixth World. Let's take a look at some of the highlights.

THE CARTEL ROOTS

No shadowrunner is surprised to learn that Aztechnology's roots are buried in crime—drug trafficking, specifically. In the early twenty-first century, three drug cartels—Medellin, David, and Massaya—joined efforts to build their legitimate business interests (some of which supported their illegal activities). Rather than make something entirely new, they bought out a Mexican corporation and named it ORO, which was an anagram of the last names of the three cartel founders as well as, happily enough, the Spanish word for gold.

Whether ORO was intended to be a new career for the leaders or just a sidelight to their drug ventures, its fortunes skyrocketed early in its existence when a large deposit of molybdenum was found off the coast on Panama in a spot controlled by the corporation. This brought in tens of billions of dollars, and suddenly the legitimate business was more lucrative than the narcotics. Not that they instantly disposed of the drugs or anything.

ORO went in a buying spree throughout Central America, diversifying and growing at a tremendous rate while buying themselves into the affections of many government bodies. This was nice, but they soon figured out that they could move a step beyond simply having good relations with government.

ACQUIRING A NATION

The structure of present-day Aztlan did not emerge all at once, and it probably was not even planned by the ORO corporation. It simply was the culmination of a journey that seemed to lead inevitably to that point. While ORO was cozying up to and occasionally buying government officials in Central America, VITAS struck Mexico. Horrible plagues in crime- and poverty-ridden nations are not easy to navigate, and the government could not handle it. It collapsed. ORO jumped in with medical aid, new infrastructure, and even a Matrix-based voting process to help build a new nation. Calling itself Aztlan to differentiate itself from the collapsed government while deriving inspiration from older sources, the new nation adopted many of the Aztec influences ORO was fond of sporting. The new government and growing corporation worked together exceedingly well, to the point where ORO moved its headquarters to the newly renamed Tenochtitlán (formerly Mexico City) in 2022, changing its name to Aztechnology.

Now, when ORO started supplying voting equipment, there were plenty of cynics who said the supposed civic charity was really a way of controlling future elections—no one could be sure what kind of back doors or other coding ORO had put in to alter results as they see fit. And sure enough, candidates who strongly supported ORO/Aztechnology filled pretty much all of the offices in the land, and while it may have been (as the Big A liked to claim) that people just really, really like Aztechnology at that point, it also might have been that Aztechnology had the fix in from day one.

Once Aztechnology had strong influence in the Aztlan government, they began to believe it was inefficient to worry about influencing several national governments when they could influence one, so Aztlan started gobbling up its neighbors to the south. The corp's growing military manufacturing capabilities and potent finance capabilities combine with pliant local officials to make most conquests go down as smooth as peppered chocolate.

- I believe it's important to note that Aztechnology and Aztlan, officially and structurally, are two separate entities. Yes, the powerful people in the Aztlan government are Aztechnology loyalists, so the two organizations dance to the same tune, but structurally they remain separate entities.
- Mr. Bonds

- On paper, maybe, but that hardly matters. Let's look at the corporate tax structure as an example. Each year, the legislature amends the corporate tax structure. Aztechnology sits alone in a category of one in that structure. Their rate is changed annually, and as it turns out the rate passed by the legislature generates a tax that exactly matches the amount budgeted for government operations by corporate headquarters. They may be technically separate, but there are zero laws preventing them from operating in a coordinated fashion, and they are in lockstep. There are individually owned Stuffer Shack franchises with more independence from Aztechnology than Aztlan.
- Sunshine

OPERATION RECIPROCITY

Just as a teenage child reaches the point where they feel a need to test their powers, abilities, and independence against the will of their parents, the rapidly growing Aztechnology corporation kept pushing against other megacorps, seeing how big it could grow and how fast it could get there. In one of the greatest signs of collusion between the Aztlan government and Aztechnology, the government started nationalizing all foreign corporate assets in Aztlan borders in 2044. Aztechnology had worked hard to obtain their territory, and they decided there was no reason to share it with anyone, including their megacorporate, extraterritorial siblings.

This turned into a major test for the future of the Sixth World and the megacorporations. Imagining the different outcomes of this scenario is an interesting exercise. What if every corp decides the Big A's actions mean it's every corp for itself? The era of total corp warfare, which the Corporate Court was instituted to avoid, would emerge, and the battle might end up making the world an even more hellish landscape than it is now. It might also have resulted in the corps taking each other out, freeing the rest of the world from their dominance, giving us the long-desired chance to build something new. Or someone, in a fit of pique about the whole thing, could have just decided to blow the whole planet to smithereens.

None of those things, of course, happened. The other AAAs united against Aztechnology and delivered the first Omega Order against a AAA corporation, instituting Operation Reciprocity in 2048 to pound the living hell out of Aztechnology. Ares guns, Saeder-Krupp tanks, Renraku planes, and more swept through a military base in Ensenada. The destruction was significant, but more important was the message: This could happen again (and again and again) if we want it to. Aztechnology caved, somewhat, and signed the Veracruz Settlement.

I say "somewhat" because the settlement did not punish Aztechnology as harshly as some megacorps wanted. The exact terms have never been made public, so there is a possibility that there are some hidden provisions that would make the whole thing seem more harsh toward the Big A, but to most observers it seems as if Aztechnology kept pretty much all the assets they nationalized, while giving up some fines or something.

- Punishment wasn't really the point. The other AAAs wanted to stop Aztechnology in its tracks and send a message that any such over-reaching in the future would not be tolerated. In that respect, the operation was a success.
- Baka Dabora

- It stopped them from doing that kind of over-reach, which primarily meant they needed to switch to a different kind of over-reach. Which they have been perfecting for decades.
- Kat St. Irregular

- Can I just state how glad I am that, for once, we avoided the debate whether it was an Omega Order or not?
- Cosmo

ANYONE CAN HAVE A BAD DECADE

The Omega Order was not the only setback Aztechnology suffered. In 2061 the Pueblo Corporate Council kept them from moving into Los Angeles, and then later that year Ghostwalker emerged from the Watergate Rift, descended on Denver, and kicked Aztlan the hell out of the city he claimed as his own.

- I know plenty of actions by Aztlan and Aztechnology since that time have given Ghostwalker plenty of reasons to not like them, but have we ever figured out why they bore the brunt of his anger right from the start? He seemed not to like them from the get-go.
- Traveler Jones

- I don't know firm answers, but Ghostwalker clearly has close contacts in various metaplanes, as does Aztechnology. If I had to guess, I'd say the grudge goes back to metaplanar activity.
- Frosty

As any such power would do after suffering such losses, Aztechnology looked around for someone to hurt, and they settled on rebels who had been occupying the Yucatan peninsula. They eventually took care of the rebels, but not before losing a CEO to assassination in 2064 and having toxic spirits cause chaos all over the peninsula. Then 2065 rolled around, and the Corporate Court made Horizon a AAA corp, putting a PR competitor in Aztechnology's face. By that point, Aztechnology had endured enough and was ready to do what it need-

ed to to in order to get its mojo back. It began gearing up for war.

SOUTHERN EXPANSION

Aztlan had been able to move south through Central America at a solid pace, but once it came close to South America, its progress slowed. They did not have any real influence with the nation of Amazonia, and that along with the political complications in the city of Bogotá halted their advance for a time. But when Aztechnology has their sights set on something, there is no such thing as stopping—just changing tactics. They engaged in a number of activities, from subverting the city government and local institutions to corrupting the ecosystem of the Awakened rainforest, and eventually they pushed Amazonia far enough. War broke out, though more of a continual guerrilla war than a large-scale massive-army-on-massive-army conflict. The fighting went on for three years, dragging Horizon into the PR fight and Saeder-Krupp into the battle to rebuild Bogotá, but eventually Aztlan came out on top. The spoils may not seem that significant—two large cities, Bogotá and Cali, as well as a border extension sixty kilometers to the south, but the symbolic value of beating back an enemy was worth a lot to the Big A. They had their swagger back, which made the world understandably nervous.

FAMINE AND SYMPATHY

While Aztlan and Aztechnology won the war, they did not come out unscathed. Most damaging was the combined attack of a hurricane and the great dragon Sirrurg on facilities responsible for processing eighty percent of Aztlan's food supply. That put the nation in a difficult spot, and they scrambled to find sources of food to keep the population of the nation fed. As it turned out, many corporations were willing to assist the nation—as long the Big A gave them the terms they wanted. Wuxing came up with a detailed financing package, and Aztlan's need was so great and immediate that their lawyers and accountants did not have time to crunch all the numbers and run through the details as much

as they would like. They removed some of the more draconian terms during their curtailed review, but there are still some significant escalators in the repayment terms that will keep Wuxing rolling in prosperity while keeping Aztechnology disgruntled for years to come.

While the famine has been problematic, the Aztechnology PR machine is too skilled to let such a vital opportunity go to waste. Images of hungry Aztlaner children have been spread throughout the world, and several charities have sprung up to help them. Many of these, of course, are Aztechnology fronts that will use the money donated to them to buy food from whatever sources they can but ensure they are shipped by Big A subsidiaries, so at least some of the money will stay in house.

The sympathy Aztechnology has engendered for their plight has brought other advantages. In late 2074, a storm of mysterious origin hit Denver, providing cover for Aztlan forces to move in and take part of the city belonging to the PCC. This was, of course, wholly unlawful, and any of the nations with a sector in the Treaty City would have been well within their rights to demand swift and immediate action against the invasion. And Ghostwalker would have been only too happy to oblige. But building resentment at Ghostwalker and famine-inspired sympathy for Aztlan led to the reprisal being nothing more than a few stern warnings. More than three years later, Aztlan retains its hold on the sections of the city it took.

- There was a little more to it than that. The PCC saw Aztlan's presence in Denver as a bargaining chip to use against Ghostwalker, or at least as a way to supremely annoy him. They thought that was worth giving up a chunk of the city for.
- Kay St. Irregular

THE AGGRESSIVE NOW

With a section of Denver in hand, firm possession of Bogotá, and recovery from the food supply attacks mostly accomplished, Aztechnology is ready for growth. And at present, the opportunities seem limitless.

First, there is the fallout from the CFD crisis. Aztechnology had been involved in Evo's effort to create an artificial Justice Hino, so as part of that partnership, they are not pushing hard on repercussions against Evo. Instead, they are more than willing to let NeoNET suffer the full brunt of the world's wrath over the unleashing of the CFD virus. If they end up acquiring significant pieces of NeoNET in the punishment process, so much the better.

Aztechnology has also been very active in the hunt for artifacts of the early part of this decade, and they used that hunt to spur their magical research into new areas. Rumors say that they have been very active on the metaplanes lately, with a special interest in investigating connections between planes. What they hope to learn from this course of study is not clear.

On the mundane front, if there is another corporation Aztechnology would like to target, it's Wuxing. The debt they owe to the vast financier weighs even heavier on their mind than on their bank account, and if they can extract concessions from Wuxing, they will. This being Aztechnology, they will not limit themselves to simple sabotage or other straightforward ways of attempting to hurt Wuxing. They will try to strike them in their central areas of expertise, qi manipulation. If they can bother Wuxing by playing with the feng shui of Hong Kong and other crucial areas, they absolutely will.

Those are some of the goals Aztechnology has. The next question is, who will carry it out?

THE TOP OF THE PYRAMID

A lot of these people you won't meet, because they built their lives to be able to avoid people like you. Still, they shape the culture of the megacorp, so what they do affects you. And some of them are on lower levels, so you might get the chance to meet them and perhaps get screwed over by them

FLAVIA DE LA ROSA

The win in the Amazonian war was quite useful in building trust in de la Rosa going forward. It wasn't as if she was inexperienced going into the job—she had been president of Aztlan for twelve years—but there were still concerns that she would have trouble transitioning from puppet to puppet master. While she had been in office for several years when it happened, the victory in the war was one of the first real triumphs that gave people full confidence in her leadership. As a longtime politician, de la Rosa tends to work people in good times and bad, and she was especially busy during the famine years, bringing her personal touch to re-assure people that their next meal was waiting for them just past the horizon.

While de la Rosa had many combustible battles with the board in her early years, things have gone much more smoothly since the war victory and the return to Denver. Aztechnology board members are too strong willed to ever be pushovers, and each of them have their own agendas that might combat with what de la Rosa is doing, but their knee-jerk reactions to her have changed—they now are initially inclined to support her rather than fight.

- All this gives de la Rosa more of a chance to assert her own identity rather than just trying to get by. That means we're learning more about her. She's more of a detail-oriented person than a visionary, but she has a true gift for finding ways to reduce redundancies between subsidiaries and getting them to work in complementary fashions. As

the Megacorporate Audit continues, she is most likely to target firms for acquisition that do something current subsidiaries do not do well, but still within their general field. She loves synergy.

- Dr. Spin

DOMINGO CHAVEZ

Chavez was perhaps the chief thorn in de la Rosa's side in the early years of her leadership. A natural aggressor, Chavez tended to feel de la Rosa moved too slowly and meekly, not moving the corporation and nation to the glory they fully deserved. Her recent victories, though, have indicated to him that perhaps she is someone he can work with after all, and they have evolved a strong partnership. That doesn't mean they see eye to eye all the time—she thinks the Azt-Am War showed that direct conflict is best used sparingly, he thinks it showed that they have a fighting force that they should be using to keep the whole world nervous—but they are much more willing to speak together and work out their differences when they occur, rather than simply butting heads.

- De la Rosa should be glad to be getting along with Chavez, as he has a definite ruthless streak in dealing with personal enemies. Board member Tsurunaga Shinoyama came down with CFD, and while he caught some flack for it, Plan 9 mentioned the theory that the infection was deliberate. Eavesdropped conversations with Chavez that have circulated around the shadows indicate that this theory is not as far-fetched as some initially thought.
- Fianchetto

- Sweet vindication.
- Plan 9

DOMINGO "DING" RAMOS

Perhaps no one in Aztechnology was happier about the victory the Azt-Am War than Ding Ramos. He won on multiple fronts—he's a major stockholder in the corp, and he saw value of his holdings grow rapidly after the victory, and he is also the leader of the David cartel and gained significant territory from which to harvest

Awakened plants or anything else of value he can find. The expansion of his cartel operations has kept Ramos busier than normal, though not at the full-time level—Ramos clings to his playboy lifestyle tightly, and he is willing to put a lot of effort into not working hard.

MOTECUHZOMA

The mystery surrounding the board member known as Motecuhzoma has not yet been solved, but some interesting new information has come out in the past few years. The rise of Aztechnology's magic research has brought him to increased prominence, as he seems to be giving most of the marching orders for some of the more adventurous tasks, like whatever went on in Antarctica. The intensity of the research into the nature of the metaplanes has persuaded some observers that he is not, as has been supposed, a free spirit. The thinking is that if he were a free spirit, he would already know some of the things he's been researching. The dragon (or feathered serpent) theory has gained some traction, though with modifications—a lot of people now believe he is a drake, which brings up a related interesting question: Who does he serve?

- The popular answer is Dzitbalchén, the feathered serpent who also owns some of Aztechnology, but I don't think that's the right answer. I believe Dzitbanchén would take care of his own business instead of appointing a surrogate. A possibly more entertaining answer is Pobre, one of the leaders of Yucatan independence.
- Kay St. Irregular

- People need more imagination. They're only looking at the dragons located close to Aztechnology's center of business, but it's a huge corporation with interests everywhere. The dragon controlling Motecuhzoma could come from anywhere. Given how long Montecuhzoma has been on the board, and the business interest he has shown, I say it's none other than Lofwyr.
- Plan 9

- If Lofwyr had possessed a mole on the board for that long, he would own the company by now.
- Thorn

J.J. HARVIN, JR.

For a while Harvin seemed like Chavez's closest ally on the board. Chavez wanted to make Aztlan great, and Harvin wanted to make Aztechnology military a massive, smooth-running, ever-conquering machine. Their goals were closely matched enough that they frequently supported each other's initiatives before the board. There was considerable speculation that Harvin had been brought on board mainly to mastermind a war against Amazonia, and once that war was fought and won, Harvin felt like he had lived up to expectations. Which meant, of course, that he felt it was time for new expectations, and this time Chavez might not be an ideal ally.

While Flavia de la Rosa is gaining popularity as Aztechnology president, Harvin is not sold on her. Sure, she beat Amazonia and got a portion of Denver, but that is not aggressive enough for Harvin. He thinks Motecuhzoma is on a good path with its magic research, and believes Aztechnology can do more than win piecemeal victories here and there. He thinks they should be walking a path toward world domination.

Much as he would like to be the one to lead Aztechnology there, he knows he is not Aztlanner enough for the job, and he is looking for an ally. He has decided Chavez and de la Rosa are too timid, and Ramos of course is a dilettante. That means he is scouring the executive ranks of the corp to find the right ally to back.

NECALI XÓLOTL

Worries are mounting that Corporate Court Justice Xólotl is in over his head with the activities of the Megacorporate Audit and the repercussions from CFD. There are certain expectations for Aztechnology executives, and the Corporate Court justice is supposed to meet them. The main thing is to not be timid, to walk with a strut, and to act instead of react. Xólotl has not been solid in any of these areas. Word is that while de la Rosa knows his limitations, she is in favor of keeping him in place, because he is easily directed. Harvin, of course, would like to punt Xólotl's hoop into the Gulf of Aztlan and get someone more shark-like in the position. Xólotl's loyalty is unquestioned, but if he stumbles and ends up costing Aztechnology in an important Coirt decision, you can bet that de la Rosa will shift to Harvin's viewpoint.

MARISOL DEOCAMPO

If you are serious about shadowruns—and what megacorp isn't?—then you need one person whose very involvement in the run signifies that drek's about to go down. In Aztechnology, that person is an ork named Marisol Deocampo. As a top-flight Ms. Johnson, she is not, of course, immediately forthcoming about her background, but teams who have talked with her say she knows her stuff down to the last detail, and that indicates that she spent time in the shadows. Rumors say her street name was Veneno, and she was a face who favored the more intimidating aspects of persuasion over gentle conversation. She was supposed to have spent a lot of time in Denver, which made her invaluable in helping plan Aztlan's return to that city.

Since she is becoming a name brand in the shadows, she has a reputation to uphold, which means she is less likely to screw you over than your average Mr. Johnson. The work she has is generally not for the faint of heart,

though, so if she hires you and the job sounds too easy, trust your instincts.

- She's still active in Denver, since Aztlan's place there is far from settled, but rumors say she has been making lots of trips to Cheyenne. Word of her activities has started to make its way to the top authorities of that nation, so she's going to have to be circumspect if she keeps working there.
- Mika

AZTECHNOLOGY ORGANIZATION

As is the case with many megacorporations, Aztechnology divides itself geographically. Here are some of the highlights of their different divisions.

AZTECHNOLOGY NORTH AMERICA

If J.J. Harvin is looking for an exacting, ruthless bastard to lead Aztechnology, Aztechnology N.A. Head Oscar Ortiz-Pena might be his man. Since Aztechnology N.A. is based in Tenochtitlán, Ortiz-Pena is already well versed in the politics of that city, and he is also ruthless and dedicated to using any means available to enforce loyalty. When Aztechnology subsidiaries sell new spell formulae designed to control and manipulate others, you can bet it was first field-tested (if not outright discovered) by mages under Ortiz-Pena's command.

Directing Aztechnology N.A. means Ortiz-Pena has a good understanding of many different ways to do business, as the Big A is heavily diversified in that continent. The trophy of Ortiz-Pena's holdings is of course Stuffer Shack, but he also oversees medical corp MediCarro and bleeding-edge tech firm Genetique. This last one has caused him no end of headaches lately due to the CFD crisis, but the fact that he has led the firm through the worst of the problems and helped it design a new, safer product line has further impressed the higher ups and might be useful for him should he make a bid for more power.

- MediCarro used to be able to operate in Amazonia, but the Azt-Am War helped reveal the firm's true colors, and Hualpa had them kicked out. The loss of clientele is only one part of the damage—being cut off from the Awakened plants of the Amazon is hurting the firm's research arm.
- Butch

AZTECHNOLOGY LATIN AMERICA

It's boom and bust in this section of Aztechnology. The boom traces its roots all the way back to the ORO Corporation, when the cartel leaders were looking for ways to launder their money and also easy ways to finance

their expanding legitimate operations and prop up the nations they were slowly buying up. They built several Latin America financial powerhouses in this time period, and those corporations continue to generate considerable profit. While war, of course, causes tremendous damage, the financial companies did good business lending to munitions manufacturers, infrastructure companies, and more, and their bottom lines stayed healthy throughout the conflict.

The bust, though, came from one of the other holdings of this division: Natural Vat Technologies, a.k.a. NatVat. The devastating attack on Aztechnology's food supply was pretty much entirely an attack on NatVat, and it left the corp crippled. Aztechnology has the resources, of course, to help it recover, but it's been a long couple of years, and while they were out of commission, other food companies rose up to fill in the gaps NatVat left. There is still plenty of business to be done feeding the people of Aztlan, but international markets for NatVat have dried up, which is not making any executives happy.

- They're going to be even less happy when Aztechnology execs decide to move on the obvious solution: If the problem was caused by famine in Aztlan, the problem can be cured by famine everywhere else. They can't be so blatant as a direct attack on other food-processing facilities, so instead I'd look for a new disease that sweeps through everyone else's soy crops, or something like that.
- Sunshine

AZTECHNOLOGY EUROPE

Aztechnology works its consumer-oriented magic here as it does everywhere in the world, but they have a special concentration of consumer-oriented goods in Europe, making them quite popular among your average Janes and Joes on the street. With their ownership of Esprit and Dassault, they also have made strong moves into the security and military technology fields. This has long been a sore spot with Saeder-Krupp, who is never pleased to see anyone else doing heavy manufacturing on what they consider to be their continent. The dragon civil war distracted S-K for a time, but with that over and Lofwyr moving into fully-focused-and-angry mode, look for Aztechnology Europe to feel more of his wrath.

- Some of the playing pieces in the battle between S-K and Aztechnology are likely to be NeoNET and Spinrad. The enmity between Spinrad and Lofwyr is legendary, and S-K will be very dedicated to thwarting Spinrad's AAA ambitions. Aztechnology, though, might decide to give Spinrad a boost, on the theory that they want whatever Lofwyr doesn't. In the middle of this, pieces are likely going to be falling off NeoNET, and there will be a lot of scrambling to see who can claim those pieces.
- Thorn
- Especially if someone somehow manages to pry off that JRJ piece.
- Nephrine

AZTECHNOLOGY AUSTRALASIA

For a long time Aztechnology had two divisions, Aztechnology Australasia and Aztechnology Asia. The former was based in Hong Kong and larger than the latter, and there were frequent questions asking why the two divisions didn't just merge. Aztechnology had idly considered the matter, but when Aztechnology Australasia head Sonia Maria Soto (ex-wife of Ding Ramos) was diagnosed as a head case, the powers that be decided the perfect time to move forward on consolidation had arrived. Aztechnology Asia head Ganika Dugal became chief of the newly consolidated division, along with the responsibility of leading Aztechnology through membership in the Pacific Prosperity Group. That membership is important to the Big A, as they are working on finding allies in this part of the world. The Japanacorps, of course, are going to stay together, Wuxing and Eastern Tiger push back on them, while Evo is torn between its Japanacorps past and Russian present. Where, in all of this, does Aztechnology fit in? Dugal's strategy is simple: Keep Aztechnology's consumer base growing, and you'll find people begging to be your allies. With her help Aztechnology has built a very strong consumer-based presence in India, and Australia has also turned into fertile ground. Corporate leadership would dearly love this division to help Aztechnology Europe put pressure on Saeder-Krupp, and if they continue their growth trends, they could be well positioned to do just that.

- Some partnerships, if not outright alliances, have emerged in this region. Wuxing was instrumental in getting Aztechnology into the Pacific Prosperity Group, though that was at least as much about pissing off the Japanacorps as it was about Aztechnology (and the subsequent loans Wuxing made to Aztechnology is chafing the latter corp). And Aztechnology worked with Evo on the whole fake Justice Hino thing. The seeds are there, now Dugal has to see what she can get to grow.
- Kay St. Irregular

AZTECHNOLOGY AFRICA

One of the advantages of essentially owning your own nation is the large volume of cheap labor you get at your disposal, but Africa can rival Aztlan in that respect. Africa has an additional advantage of having many resources to exploit, especially magical resources that are critical to Aztechnology's arcane divisions. Aztechnology was very deliberate about establishing good relations with Thema Luala, the Ghoul Queen of Asamando, and they continued relations with her daughter

Rani after Thema's passing. Queen Rani has not exactly been open to outsiders, but the work Aztechnology has already put in will put keep them a step ahead of most competitors in terms of unlocking some of Asamando's secrets. They also have solid corporate branches in the Awakened nation of Sheba, and arcane services rival Mitsuhama is desperately looking at how to close the Big A's advantage there. One place they have struck out, though, is with the spirits around the Kilimanjaro Mass Driver, as those spirits cannot be persuaded to like anyone with megacorporate affiliation.

AZTECHNOLOGY IN THE SHADOWS

RUNNING FOR AZTECHNOLOGY

Do you have a code? Do you believe there is such a thing as honor in the shadows? Take a few missions for Aztechnology and see how well your principles survive. Aztechnology has a gift for asking you to do the things you don't want to do, or making you think about ethics you never thought would be brought into question. This is a simple side effect of the way they do business—in the shadows, Aztechnology is associated with a number of powerful but ethically dubious people and creatures, and in the process of dealing with them, things tend to get messy.

Some examples will help show what I'm talking about. There was a job in the Yucatan to protect a toxic shaman and his family from some aggressive thunderbirds who were not pleased at the pollution of their land. There was a job in Havana to break into a Batista-owned facility and free three hostages there, one of whom was a child molester. Mr. Johnson declined to tell the runners which person that was, of course. And there was a job in Denver to collect people who could be used for sacrifices to summon a blood spirit that would then be used to expel a master shedim and his followers from their lair in the Aurora Warrens.

These are the kind of things you may have to think about when working for Aztechnology. The advantage is that Aztechnology has been burned too often by runners turning on them when they found out just what their job entails, so they have become more forthcoming with details. Also, they know that when a job particularly sucks, higher pay should be involved, so they often pay well.

- Cosmo is exaggerating a little. Aztechnology is a massively huge, fully diversified company, so all kinds of jobs are available, with Johnsons who are liable to screw you over. The type of jobs he's talking about certainly exist, but they are by no means the only ones Aztechnology has.
- Cayman
- Ah, but they are the ones that give the corp its special flavor.
- Marcos

RUNNING AGAINST AZTECHNOLOGY

Let's say you're doing a run against Mitsuhama, and you get to a point where you are going to have to penetrate one of their secure corporate facilities. You know their Zero Zone policy. You know what they are going to try to do to you, and you know what kind of hell is waiting for it. It's going to be hard, it's going to be bloody, but at least you have some idea what you can expect.

Possibly the worst thing about running against Aztechnology is you never know what to expect. Maybe they'll have surprisingly low security, letting you get into a facility, just so they can pick up some hair you accidentally left behind and roast you with some brutal ritual magic while you're trying to make your escape. Security may be highly skilled guards, trained Awakened critters, half-crazed free spirits, or any combination of those and anything else you can imagine that might kill you. Their security mages might attack you with a huge exploding fireball, or they might insinuate some minor illusion that at first seems like a minor distraction, but then stays with you for days and days (making you wonder how they sustain the damn thing) until it drives you insane. They might tip off the local police if they detect your activities, or they might tip off the local ghoul enclave full of beings desperately hungry for a meal.

The point is, Aztechnology had access to every kind of destructive evil the Sixth World has seen, and they lack any scruples that would keep them from using it. You don't know just what they will throw at you; you just know it will suck. *Caveat cursor.*

EVO

Walking past the rows of cubicles, Vice marveled at the variations of metahumanity contained in this one small office. A four-armed, blue-skinned human who smelled strongly of curry was rapidly typing with two hands, while the third hand cycled images across a sheet of e-paper and the fourth manipulated something virtual that Vice couldn't see. One cubicle over was a female ork, or what once was an ork, now she looked more felis than robustus, so much so that her AR swatting looked like a cat playing with an invisible dangling toy. Vice wasn't sure if her changes were cosmetic or genetic. He had a way to check but didn't think it was important. It didn't matter here.

That was one of the key reasons that he was where he was; walking through an Evo Corporation office in Renton, following a man who he had known only as Mr. Johnson, but others referred to as Andy, Ando, and Mr. Anderson as they passed through the building, depending on their level of familiarity, or professional position, on the way to his office to discuss the particulars of Vice's future employment with Evo. It was a long way from the slums of Redmond where Klaus had found him all those years ago. But a lot of things had changed since then.

Mr. Whatever's office was located in the corner, but both the entryway and the outer windows were rounded, just like the outside of the building. Once inside the office, the door slid closed behind Vice as his new boss took a seat behind the desk.

"Please, Vice, take a seat," he offered politely as he waved a hand toward two large comfortable chairs in front of his desk.

"Thankssss," Vice said. The slight hiss his voice took on was a consequence of his form that he normally tried to cover, but he felt comfortable being himself here. As he sat in the large chair, the seat, sides, and back all adjusted to his size. Evo was full of features that adjusted to the forms of its citizens.

"Is it what you expected? The office, I mean."

"Evo is well known for their acceptance of diversity, and you certainly have a diverse staff here, but this is one office among thousands. I'll withhold judgment on the satisfaction of my expectations. For now, I see I have a place I'll fit in. Though I still see the norm sitting in the corner office while all that variation does the work in the cubes."

Vice watched as the suit behind the desk reached behind his head and pulled his collar-length hair upwards. His head leaned forward and the hair moved up further than it should have naturally. The motion kept going and separated the full-head hairpiece to reveal a bald greyish-green scalp. He set the hairpiece on the desk and continued his revelation by peeling away a thin layer of nanopaste from his face. He removed his gloves to reveal grey-green hands with jagged grey nails. The pieces of the disguise, each laid on the desk, were dramatically lifted and dropped into a drawer.

"I need to maintain a certain plainness in my position. As you can see, I am just as varied as the others. In truth, I detest my disguise, but there would be no point in calling myself Mr. Johnson and looking like this. There is no anonymity in my natural state."

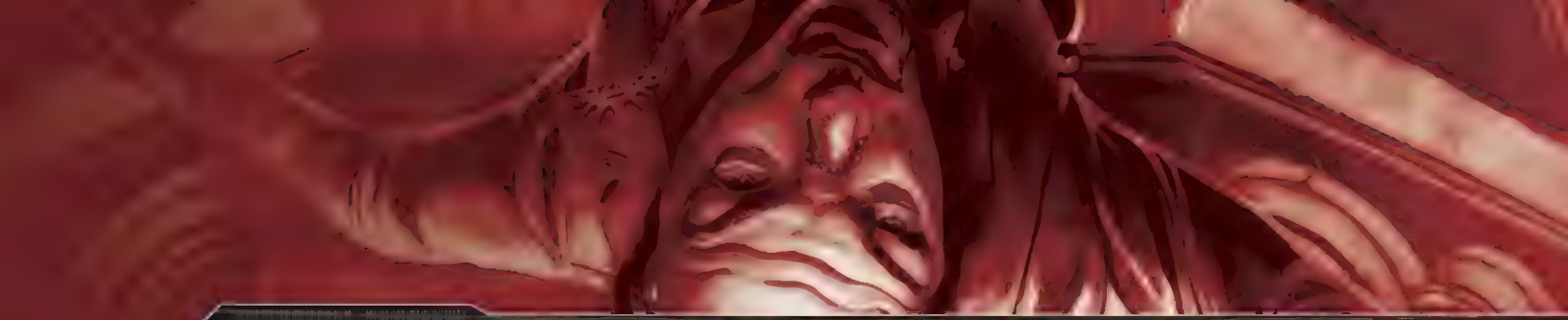
Vice thought for a moment and focused his response on the only part of the little demonstration that he felt truly mattered or needed addressing.

"Then how should I addressss you?"

"If you'd allow me to call you Mikhail, I'd happily let you call me Andrew."

"You call me Mik, I'll call you Ando."

"Perfect."



EVO CORPORATION

Corporate Court Ranking (2078): #7
Corporate Slogan: "Evo is Acceptance"
Corporate Status: AAA, public corporation
Worlds Headquarters: Vladivostok, Russia
President: Yuri Shibanokuji
CEO: In Selection Process
Major Shareholders: Buttercup (30%), Yuri Shibanokuji (23%), Ren Iwano (8%), Hideo Yoshida (4%), Ramon Dizon (2%), Minor Shareholders (33%)

MAJOR DIVISIONS

Evo Africa and Middle East, Evo Asia, Evo Australasia, Evo Europe, Evo India, Evo North America, Evo South America, Evo Space

MAJOR SUBSIDIARIES:

Financials
ATRP: Investment

Services
CrashCart Medical Services: Medical Service Provider

Media
Ersatz!: Simsense
MetaMatrix: Social Media
Yamatetsu Productions: Media

Consumer Goods
Lightning Brands: Food
MetaErgonomics: Metahuman Consumer Goods

Industry
ByDesign: Cybernetics
Pensodyne: Biotech and Genetech
Roskosmos: Spacetech
Saotome Aquadomes: Aquaculture and Aquatic Mining
Tsuruga International: Construction
Yamatetsu Naval Technologies: Construction, Aquatech, and Miltech

HISTORIC EVOLUTION

POSTED BY: PLAN 9

Many years ago there was a Japanese megacorporation named Yamatetsu. Yamatetsu wasn't like the other Japanese megacorporations. They saw the limits and strictures of the standard Japanese corporate culture as the ways of the past and chose to make a change. They opened their corporate doors to those who were considered unacceptable by the traditional culture. The move boosted their position in the megacorporate pool around the world, but their place within Japan and among the ranks of their fellow Japanese megacorporations plummeted. They took in the unwanted as workers, only to become unwanted themselves.

Another change was needed. Yamatetsu moved their headquarters across the Sea of Japan to Vladivostok, Russia. The move further deepened the rift between the company's more traditional members and the majority shareholders, but appeasements were made to soothe sore egos. It was a time of great turmoil within the megacorporation as the reality of no longer being a Japanacorp set in for the traditionalists. Lashing out was common and often quite explosive. The rest of the corporation settled into their new Russian home and went about the business of becoming the most open and accepting of all the megacorporations when it came to the form of its employees. Yamatetsu welcomed all into the fold, no matter their form. It was a big opportunity, as the world added SURGE and AIs grew in number. Then the Crash of '64 changed everything, again.

The Crash hit Yamatetsu hard and early. Their Vladivostok headquarters were cut off from the rest of the corporation, and havoc ensued. Various offices and divisions of the company suddenly took it upon themselves to try to take over several small countries throughout Asia. The efforts were not supported by the corporation as a whole, but that nonetheless created an image issue for the company.

The majority stockholders took a hard look at Yamatetsu and decided it was time for a change; an EVOlution

ANATOLY ZHUKOV KIRILENKO (23 FEBRUARY 2010 – 16 DEC 2077)

Born the 23rd of February, 2010, Anatoly Zhukov Kirilenko was a regular Russian boy who dreamed of growing up to touch the stars. He joined the Russian Aerospace Force in order to fulfill those childhood dreams as best he could by flying jets and getting closer to space. He left the military with the rank of Polkóvnik when he was recruited to work for Roskosmos in 2055. His dream of touching the stars was close.

In June 2064, Anatoly departed Earth for a faraway destination: Mars. The trip was a bold effort to set foot on the distant red planet. Almost a year later, Anatoly Kirilenko became the first metahuman to set foot on Mars. The man ushered in a new era of space exploration and inspired billions around the world.

When he returned to Earth in June 2066, he was a worldwide hero. Within a month he was selected to become the CEO of Yamatetsu as they bravely looked toward the future. He held the position through the transformation of Yamatetsu into Evo and never wavered from his devotion to space even while firmly planted behind the desk of a corporate office.

From the top of Evo, Anatoly built a base on Mars, expanded Evo's space resources, brought a love of space to nations all over the world, and gave everything he had to Evo.

As a CEO, a friend, a Defender of the Fatherland, and a true Russian hero, Polkóvnik Anatoly Zhokov Kirilenko will be missed.

- I notice they left out the youth he spent as a courier and eventual enforcer for the Vory all over Russia, much of Asia, and throughout Europe. He stopped working directly for them when he entered the Russian air force. His ties were never totally cut and they're a key piece in why Yamatetsu/Evo was so successful in their move. His death left a lot of loose ends that will take runners to tie up or cut off.
- Red Anya

- The rumors of his CFD infection kept the shadows buzzing and running in a dozen directions at once. Those directions were often contradictory to one another, preventing any true clarity from emerging. Whether he was or wasn't a head case is moot. The fact is his work runs the gamut of jobs, and most of them are still open contracts with Johnsons paid in advance. Before anyone mentions those Johnsons taking the cash and running, don't bother. One tried it and someone made an example of him. The rest are completing the work quite dutifully.
- Fianchetto

- Plenty of those jobs involve the new monad movement from both sides of the issue. If Kirilenko was a head case, he was struggling against the AI side of himself. Grabbing newly declared monads, helping monads reach secure facilities, creating both support and animosity for monads, and keeping the pressure up on other megacorps that have been taking in or offering sanctuary to monads. Again, some of that is benefiting the monads and keeping them away from megas like MCT that will dissect them for the next advantage, and some is limiting their ability to put a positive spin on their existence.
- Netcat

- For anyone who missed it, Kirilenko was one of the last victims of Riser's restorative killing spree. He didn't pull the trigger himself, but he did collect the fee. He shared it with a small team of runners who actually took out Kirilenko and apparently took something off his body at the same time. What they took is a big question mark, but lots of folks are laying down nuyen to figure that out.
- Balladeer

as they put it. It was a solid PR winner, and Evo Corporation was born.

Evo was truly about evolution—the evolution of metahumanity into their ultimate self. The evolution of metahuman culture into metasapient culture where all free-willed, thinking beings should be allowed to participate in society without persecution. Evolution of the modern multinational megacorporation into the multi-planetary megacorporation.

Evo didn't believe that metahumanity should be inhibited by its physical limitations. This was not simply about customizing and improving the metahuman form with cyberware, bioware, geneware, and nanoware. This was about allowing metahumanity to escape the limited confines of Earth's surface and to seek a route for the metahuman soul to escape the physical cage and join the eternity of the electronic. They pushed limits in every aspect of metahuman augmentation and modification and set themselves apart from their counterparts by building metahumans who could work in extreme environments, both on and off Earth, without special gear.

Evo opened its citizenship to any being who could comprehend its own existence in relation to the existence of the other beings of the world. That meant metasapients of any species could gain citizenship as long as they were able to recognize the sapience of other sapient species. The method meant citizenship wasn't

universal within a species but was determined on a case-by-case basis. With the exception of metahumans, because they have never been expected to be universally accepting of other sapient species.

- The basics for this developed when Evo realized that they had shifters working for them who considered some of their coworkers to be part of the food chain. They didn't report any incidents of coworkers eating one another, but the key word there is "report." There's a reason for every law based in someone's actions. Man is not a forward thinker most of the time.
- Red Anya

Evo traversed space like many other megacorporations, but they are the only megacorporation with citizens inhabiting another planet. The citizens of Gagarin Mars base, who now number in the hundreds, did not go there to visit. They went there to explore and cultivate. The red planet is home to metahumans of all shapes and sizes, and even some of those specialized ones that were mentioned earlier, because Evo doesn't think form should limit function. Besides Gagarin, Evo also has the Shibanokuji Free Fall space station where everyone can go to take a load off. And while those two may be the most well-known, Industry II is Evo's ultimate space resource, where they precision-craft the cyberware that Evo is famous for.

All of these things add up within one principle that Evo brought to the forefront of minds around the world: transhumanism, the questioning of what it is to be human. Evo was the place to go to discover your own transhuman truth.

While these concepts are valuable to know to understand where Evo came from, I need to make sure I also express more on the regular history of the megacorporation. Within Russia the megacorporation thrived, and Russia thrived with it. A key player in the success of Evo in Russia was Anatoly Kirilenko. Kirilenko was a cosmonaut famous for the first manned mission to Mars and was appointed as CEO of Yamatetsu shortly after his return from said trip. While early cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin may have been the namesake for the Mars base, Kirilenko did the groundbreaking. He was a hero to the people, and as CEO he made Yamatetsu, and shortly thereafter Evo, feel like a true Russian corporation.

The nation also influenced the attitudes and cultural mentality of the corporation. While accepting of all, the new megacorporation had a direct way about it that reflected the unforgiving and brutal side of Russian culture. This attitude (along with the open-mindedness of EvoCulture, as their universal acceptance expectations are called) also helped the megacorporation expand into many of the world's Awakened nations. Thanks to their open and direct dealings and the fact they were considerate of a highly variant population, Evo became the primary megacorporation in many places that had before been off-limits to all corporations.

Recent history has not been kind to Evo. Their transhumanist philosophy and advanced augmentation technology made them suspects for all the tech and nanite issues that arose alongside cognitive fragmentation disorder. While public blame has not been laid, Evo has suffered in the court of public opinion.

CORPORATE CULTURE

Not long ago the culture of Evo was about raising the metahuman form to its full potential, a transhumanist principle guiding the citizens to bring forth their ultimate selves through a wide array of expressions. The new Evo has stepped back from their transhumanist principles and focused more on their culture of universal acceptance. They have become less about a "let's change ourselves" philosophy and more about the philosophy of understanding, creating a world (or at least a megacorporation) where all forms are equal.

TODAY'S EVO

POSTED BY: PLAN 9

Since I was good and didn't go batshit on the piece I put together to give a look at the past, the trinity is letting me give the view on the current Evo. There's a lot going on, and while most would expect me to focus all my efforts and information on the head cases and monads, I really want everyone to get a good view of Evo's progress toward the future. They're making big changes these days, but what else would you expect from a corporation built on emulating the concept of evolution. That doesn't mean I won't give an update on the monads since they're playing a part in Evo's recent changes, but I'll also take a look at the recent internal struggle for the new top seat, and the changes and maneuvers that the megacorporation is using to maintain their place.

NUEVO CEO

We all know Anatoly Kirilenko is dead. He was a powerful force within Evo and a key component in their successful shift to Russia. His death has left a massive power vacuum at the top of the company, both in terms of leadership and as a figurehead. The company is yet to name a new CEO even months after his death as they seek to find the ideal candidate for their next EVOlution. Kirilenko was the key to moving over to Russia, but they need something different now. They've stabilized and expanded in their new home so Kirilenko was no longer necessary. There was even speculation that the hit was contracted by Evo in order to clear out his seat for someone not so rooted in the last EVOlution. The new battle for CEO has several strong candidates, each with a slightly different focus to their agenda and a different member of the major shareholders supporting their ap-

pointment. Best thing to do here is to take a look at the candidates and get some commentary, so here goes.

STRATO CUMULUS

A free spirit of storm, Cumulus joined Yamatetsu back in the early '60s. He added the Strato portion of his name to appease those who were uncomfortable with his nature, thinking that having two names was all that made him different. He uses the traditional Japanese order of names to honor the company that first accepted him, though he now laughs at these choices.

His standard appearance is that of a two-meter-tall Japanese male. His distinctive height is further accented by the perpetually disheveled mop of hair atop his head. While the mop spends most of its time in the ancestral black color, it will occasionally streak through with white, like lightning in a dark sky. His ice-blue eyes also hint at his true nature. He is not limited to this form and does, on occasion, take on a less conspicuous appearance, especially when out checking on his staff.

- Early on other executives assumed the hair's lightning effect was some way to tell Cumulus' mood. When he learned of this, he started focusing on using the effect to his advantage. The effect only works with those who don't know him, but that is still most of the world. At least for now.
- Frosty

His appointment is being supported by Buttercup, as most would expect, but not because he is also a free spirit. Cumulus quickly worked his way up the ranks of the Evo agribusiness division and has streamlined every aspect of the division he has been put in charge of with minimal employee disturbance and maximum application of diversity. Each location was adapted to best suit the employees who lived and worked on site. This individualization created a wide range of individual living quarters and public areas that blend everyone's biological living environment together to allow natural comfort and comfortable socialization. For outsiders, these areas are often confusing and occasionally dangerous, but AR warnings are all over, and everyone who comes to visit is given a briefing on the facility. The obvious issue here is that runners don't get corporate briefings, so they'll need to do some recon to find out if they're about to go into a facility with stultifyingly high humidity and scorching temps or an icy tundra.

His skills and efforts to promote the individual while also integrating them into the whole of Evo are why Buttercup wants him in place. Evo is about acceptance, and that acceptance is tested with every new species that comes up sentient. Cumulus has integrated every being he has come across seamlessly. Some occasionally have to be moved to specialized facilities, but no would expect a naga to work in the tundra.

Opposition from all the other shareholders question his true reason for working with Evo. Free spirits are

notoriously alien and rarely have the same agenda as beings who spend all their time on the material plane. Yuri is particularly opposed because Cumulus lacks the ability to experience, and therefore facilitate, their space program. Others see the appointment as a bit too permanent with a being that doesn't age.

- Cumulus is using the locations that he designs as a way to shape the mana of the area. One would expect the aspecting to be toward him, but instead it benefits those present and working on arcane studies at the sites. Each is different, but he has geomancy skills to rival folks at Wuxing.
- Winterhawk

- Most likely it's a deal he makes with the people there. They provide him with something tangible to him, energy of some kind, and he sets the place up to make their job easier. It's quite common for spirits to make deals like this with people.
- Frosty

TAYLOR DACOPRAL

The current top contender is the AI known as Taylor Dacopral. Dacopral is an abbreviation for Data Correlation and Processing Algorithm, and it happened to like the name Taylor. It also has a problem with anyone using male or female references to its person, which is not surprising for a being that has no concept of sexuality and has stated its desire to be fairly judged simply as a sentience without the preconceived notions of human gender blurring the lines before they are drawn—a key viewpoint that makes it the ideal prospect for EvoCEO.

Taylor has been working with Yamatetsu Naval as a project manager and design specialist for anthroform drones. It doesn't limit design plans to purely humanoid forms, and many designs incorporate a variety of animal features. Several of Taylor's designs even possess the ability to convert between various forms. The systems required and the extremely foreign nature of these designs make them ideal for AIs and exceptionally difficult for standard riggers.

Support for Taylor is coming from Hideo Yoshida as an effort to rekindle the name of Yamatetsu by promoting a candidate from one of the divisions that still bears the original name. While no one expects the megacorp to go back to the old name, having some positive PR for the Yamatetsu name would help balance the brand damage that is occurring with the Evo name.

- That's a nice front-page line, but Plan 9 must not have dug into much on Hideo's choice. Taylor spends a small amount of energy and processing power designing drones. The rest of its sleepless existence is spent working on black projects for Yamatetsu Naval. It just barely made it out of Boston's naval yard system before the quarantine went into place. Taylor supposedly pulled huge amounts of data out before it left and has that info hanging over the heads of the major shareholders.
- Glitch

Part of the opposition's case against Taylor is its focus on designs that are very AI-centric. Many of the animal designs have been testing grounds for allowing protosapient and feral AIs to run a body in the physical world. The limited focus on AI-compatible systems and potentially dangerous research using those non-sapient AIs makes others of a more physical nature nervous. In order to ease those issues, Taylor spends most of its public time operating via an anthroform drone.

- Like operating an anthroform is going to take much of its processing power. Most of the time, Taylor is probably operating on several grids even while it's running the show at Yamatetsu research.
- Netcat

CYNTHIA BILLS

Cynthia Bills is the new name of Angela Kline, a former NeoNET researcher with ties back to Celedyr's Albuquerque facility. Her exact position when she was at the facility is unknown, but the new name is part of being one of the first monads, née head cases. Bills came to Evo early on with information on NeoNET's efforts that got her a quiet little cell. From her cell she worked her way onto the lab team of the researchers taking an early look at CFD. Her insider perspective and openness earned her more freedom and a chance meeting with Yuri during a lab visit. He was astonished by the work they had managed so quickly and found her stability compared to so many other head cases quite interesting. He promoted her to head up the research team, though he left abundant security in place just in case. Over the course of the next few years, Bills proved herself over and over. With recent acceptance of monads within the corp being a big-ticket item, Yuri has found a person he trusts, one that he can put in a leadership position to create an image of acceptance.

Thanks to her monad abilities, Cynthia is in peak physical condition. She was born in the '20s, but she looks like she's in her twenties. Her hair, once beginning to thin and grey, has returned to its former strawberry blonde luster. She still wears her glasses even if they are simply an affectation from her past.

It's easy to understand why those who stand against Bills for CEO cite her former position at NeoNET and the normal instability of head cases as strong reasons to keep her from the top seat. All of the monad issues have to play out behind the scenes because of Evo's public acceptance of all. Her position at NeoNET is an easier target, but it's a complicated play due to the number of

years, the location, her new identity, and the fact that it's NeoNET and their name has its own share of issues.

- To better understand Cynthia Bills, one must look back at Angela Kline. Kline's expertise in sentient programming and the fact that she worked in Albuquerque means she was part of the problem that started all this. If she isn't Patient Zero, she's probably somewhere in the first ten. She was more than likely within the lab where the AIs did the nanite programming in order to escape. If not the specific lab, she was in the facility and came to Evo very shortly after FastJack's break-in.
- Glitch

- If Kline was changed from the start, why wasn't she able to develop a cure quickly?
- Balladeer

- There isn't one.
- Sticks

- When most people contemplate an escape plan from prison, they do not have a plan for breaking back in. As we've seen and heard from countless head cases, this was an escape plan. There was no return plan. Bills' work at Evo wasn't even in the development of a cure, it was working on consciousness transfers. She wasn't looking at how to save Dr. Kline, only how to get her original electronic form back.
- Butch

YSIL

As a naga, Ysil knows the closed-minded view of most of the world. When Evo came to Angkor Wat to study and understand how they could work to benefit the naga, she was a skeptic, but the actions of the megacorporation changed her opinion. What she later saw of other corporations as she worked her way up to the executive suites reinforced her original opinion with regard to Evo's competitors. This fueled her desire to lift Evo higher and bring meta-friendly products and services to every region of the planet.

Ysil first joined Evo as a MetaErgonomics device tester for naga-customized products. Strong suggestions and a quick mind for solutions moved her up the ladder quickly. Executive offices opened up her ability to expand the places she had access to and species she could work with. As she encountered new cultures and species all over the world, she put her mind for solutions to good use, and helped grow MetaErgonomics and MetaMatrix to what they are today.

As Ren Iwano was a major part of the initial efforts in Angkor Wat, it's no surprise that he is behind Ysil's bid for CEO. While Ren moved on to other projects, he kept track of Ysil and continued to tap her skills and knowledge for projects around the world in order to keep her in the loop on the corporation's global activity. As Ren is usually a supporter of more traditional views, the promotion of a naga may seem unusual, but many metasapient beings, especially those with legendary traditions, are revered even by traditionalists. This is the perfect move for a traditionalist to promote a non-human and therefore the Evo principles of acceptance while staying true to form on their traditional views.

- Also helps that Ysil has privately made some very traditionalist-like statements about other metatypes. Her views are less based in racial bigotry and more in social elitism as she finds the inability of anyone, including Ren, to touch mana as a sign of their weakness or limitations.
- Winterhawk

- Which is the reason she has been part of projects all around the world to try to teach everyone to touch mana. She doesn't believe there is some magic gene that you need to have to control mana—all you need is an aura and a strong mind.
- Frosty

- Yeah, she's wrong.
- Haze

- Have these projects been successful?
- Lyran

- Depends on what you mean by success. A lot of people have been able to manipulate mana through her programs that didn't originally appear to be Awakened. Over ninety percent of these people also stroked out due to the stress that mana manipulation puts on your body.
- Frosty

While acceptance is the name of the game for Evo, even they aren't sure if the megacorp is ready for a naga CEO. Opposition to Ysil's CEO consideration has been inciting violence against nagas around the world. Most of the efforts try to goad the naga into doing something "bestial" to prove they aren't in control of themselves, and instead are simply giant talking snakes. From most of the attempts I've seen, I give credit to the naga as a species for remaining far calmer than average metahumans would. The way these people treat them would incite rage in the Dalai Lama, and yet the naga often remain peaceful and non-aggressive. Physical assaults have occurred, and at least one naga was shot to death while trying to defend himself from a mob of metahumans. Anti-Ysil forces have also been focusing heavily on several of the less-savory projects that Ysil has helped develop. Weaponization of various metasapient toxins, development of treatments to incite Sudden Unexplained Recessive Genetic Expression (SURGE) or to

push the process to full expression, and efforts to create Evo security units entirely made up of metasapients with complementary abilities—all of these things can easily be painted in a light that could dissuade the support of the company's metahuman population.

- Acceptance of all so quickly turns to exploitation of all, doesn't it?
- Icarus

ABHI KALA

The efforts going into placing a shareholder-friendly CEO are not limited to the majority shareholders. A third of Evo's stock is held by those with small percentages, and this group has somehow managed to come together enough to generate support for a candidate of their own. While appointment of a CEO is exactly that—appointment, not election—something strangely reminiscent of a democratic process seems to be brewing. Abhi Kala is the man-of-the-people selection.

Kala is a native of the Indian Union. He applied for Evo citizenship in 2063, shortly after SURGE revealed his nartaki genetics. He's been with the megacorporation since and currently sits as the Vice President of Asset Analysis for Evo India. He is a young choice at only thirty-six, but his age is part of his wide appeal. His youthful looks catch the interest of the youth of Evo. His changeling nature appeals to all of the various metasapient and metavarient citizens of Evo. His cyberware appeals to those in the corporation who wish to change themselves through augmentation. He has had one of his arms replaced and possesses a dermal sheath due to an attack when he SURGEd, and he's had a number of internal systems added as well. The arm and sheath are part of his last major area of appeal. He resonates with every Evo citizen who has ever been attacked or persecuted for being different, which pretty much gets everyone not born and sheltered away in an arcology somewhere. Abhi is the everyman and the epitome of EVOlution.

His youth is cited by his detractors as well as his violent hobby. Abhi participates in the EvoCombat League, an internal sport-fighting organization where contestants are matched up simply by wins and losses. It's quite the spectator sport, and it's how the minority shareholders found and selected Abhi. He managed to hold the top seat for two fights before he was deposed by an undefeated free earth spirit who still holds the top position. The fights are never to the death and are all about fun and demonstrating the versatility and variety of the people of Evo.

- You called it a problem and then made it sound like the heart of Evo. I think Plan got a little gushy over a favorite sport. Truth is the EvoCombat League is participated in by less than a tenth of a percent of the Evo citizenship and watched by only about ten percent. Though the fights are not to the death, it's still a bloodsport and not to everyone's liking.
- Netcat

- I don't know how anyone is going to depose Granite, that free earth spirit. Joint locks don't work and he's stronger than most of the trolls I know. Gambling revenue is gonna drop for the top fights because only desperate suckers are going to bet against him.
- Slamm-0!

- So I shouldn't tell everyone about your last bet?
- Netcat

- You were giving 1000:1 odds. Just for the off-chance that Rally pulled it off, the 100 bucks was worth it.
- Slamm-0!

- On topic ... the EvoCombat angle may be small, but it's exposure, and you know what they say about bad publicity. His smarts and charm have got a lot more than the normal ten percent watching his fights and learning about him. Evo India has had more virtual visitors in the last month than in the previous year combined.
- Traveler Jones

- His street name was Rocky. He may have joined Evo after he changed, but he was a runner in the IU before that and even for a little while after just to get out some pent-up aggression. He had a serious hooder streak. While he may be in a good place as a man of the people, if "the people" find out he was a shadowrunner, it won't matter. Even if he did start doing it to help his poor family.
- 2XL

THE NEW EVOLUTION

(A.K.A. DUCKING THE BLAME)

One of the big issues that whoever gets that top seat is going to have to deal with is the fallout from CFD and dealing with where the blame falls. From what everyone seems to be saying, the private blame is going to hit NeoNET, and thanks to Boston their corporate beatdown will seem like a punishment for something in that city and not CFD. The monad issue is going to have eyes over on Evo as they've opened their doors to all, even while blame falls elsewhere for the root cause.

But even with all that to come for the new boss, Evo has already begun the process of avoiding damage to their bottom line by compartmentalizing and making early changes. Evo, as a specific brand, will be virtually non-existent by the end of the year. Over the course of the next few months they'll rebrand everything into their existing subsidiaries or create new ones in order to keep the Evo brand name off existing products.

The megacorporation will still be known for its open acceptance of all, and anyone applying for employment or citizenship with Evo will be brought through Evo offices and headquarters and then transferred to where they are needed. Tracking ownership back to Evo is going to become one of those unpleasant and long data hunts you send the hacker on while they're still jacked up on long haul. This will hopefully create the kind of separation the megacorporation needs in order to avoid damaging business with their efforts on the monad issue, which I'll cover later.

For now, let's look at those rebranding efforts and expose why they are so important when Evo is not the corp taking the blame. The two biggest reasons are views on tech advancement and efforts to avoid losses when the Revision Committee comes to look at Evo assets.

Tech advancements are usually viewed in one of two ways: with awe and wonder by those who see the value the tech adds to life, and with suspicion and fear by those who wonder what the tech costs, both in terms of money and morals. The latter is the group Evo is trying to avoid rousing simply by the presence of their name. They don't want people to become instantly suspicious of their newest products just because they are made by Evo. That may sound suspicious, and it is. The reason for Evo's sudden tech leap has nothing to do with years of hard work finally coming to fruition and everything to do with their new relationship with the monads. Again, more on that later, but for right now I'd like to just mention a few points where Evo has been gaining new insights and what that means for us and maybe a comment or two about the world at large.

Evo has new gadgets and tech galore. They've recently starting field testing and limited release on products through Pensodyne, Lightning, Roskosmos, Red Star, CrashCart, ByDesign, and a suddenly well-funded little corp called Arcane Revolutions. These tests are also just the things that these companies have announced publicly. I'm sure some of our esteemed members have seen more than just these corps and the products they've announced hit the local gangs, squatters, and barrens "volunteers" over the past months.

- Chip truth. ByDesign is new on the market, but the bleeding-edge cyber that street rippers are claiming came from them is generations ahead of even the top Spln and MCT designs. The money that's being paid to snag some of these guys is way out of standard range too. I haven't seen much of it, as the front end is really low or non-existent and the back-end requires the target to not self-destruct. A few messy jobs later and I've stopped taking them.
- Balladeer

- Arcane Revolutions is a front for Evo?! No wonder. I did a job to try to snag a few guttermages who were burnt out from slinging a few too many cheap-o spells for kicks. Easy gig. Hackster tracked the money back to AR. Small, no major red flags. That should have been the red flag. Point is, three weeks later I see one of those guttermages on the street, and he recognizes me. He's dressed a lot nicer and has a nice AR corporate pin on his lapel. I'm ready to walk away when I get this little tingle on my neck, and he's wiggling his fingers and smiling at me. He invites me for a sit down, and though I'm seriously leery I grab a cup of soykaf. He's super grateful and tells me all about how I saved his life and how AR has revolutionary techniques to help rekindle the Talent. Bulldrek meter fills up, and then when we're about to leave he asks if I want my arm healed. It was in a sling and cast from a too-close shotgun blast and was on its way to the ghoul feeder once I scraped the cash for a replacement, maybe before if the infections got worse. I decline politely, thinking the last time I saw him healing a paper cut would have likely stroked him out. He insists, and I get ready to dial the meat wagon. Moral of the story: my arms healed, he didn't even break a sweat, and AR has some prime techniques that could change the world forever.
- Sticks

- Pensodyne has some field test offers out that seem like part of this. Bioware systems that seem ahead of their time and some gene therapies they claim create zero cyber rejection. They've put out some nanoware pitches too, but I've been skeptical of all of it because it all sounds too good to be true. The sales line is too heavy. All of it was probably true, and there's probably some teenage street knife out there right now running with next-gen systems and no clue, or care, where the tech came from.
- Stone

- With the deep space trip coming up, a lot of runs against Roskosmos have occurred in the last year hoping to get some info on the ship. Evo finally laid full claim on Roskosmos and moved in Yamatetsu Marines to guard all of the high-security facilities, but it wasn't soon enough to keep plenty of plans from leaking out. None of them appear to be the actual deep-space ship, but Evo might be the first to make civilian space-faring vessels a reality. That's if the plans I've seen even make a functional ship. It's way beyond my schooling, and no one is taking it seriously enough to make me an offer high enough to compel me to dig up a preview.
- Mika

- Any chance these designs show the finished product, and it looks like a flying needle?
- Kane

- They do and it does.
- Mika

- Give me a PM and we'll talk. I've seen several out over the South Atlantic and have a decent idea where they're taking off from. Let's get you paid and this info to the right people. Namely me, so I can become the first space privateer!
- Kane

- Don't like the sound of space pirate?
- Slamm-0!

- I plan to be funded early on. Piracy will come later.
- Kane

- Saotome and Lightning have collaborated on the release of limited supplies of a new product for market evaluation. It's a seaweed breed supposedly grown on Central Pacific open-ocean farms. Documentation on it states it has a growth rate ten times faster than its base species, its growth absorbs unsafe levels of heavy metals and carbon from the water, and it releases oxygen back into the ocean cycle at a parallel rate to its growth.
- Ecotope

- SeaBites! Those are so delicious. The texture's great too. It almost makes me forget that I'm eating processed seaweed in the shape of little fish. This stuff better make it big. It's actually good.
- Slamm-0!

- Slamm-0!, you ever notice how little in the way of valuable information you contribute here?
- Glitch

- Challenge accepted!
- Slamm-0!

Their corporate maneuvering places more value in Evo's assets than in the parent megacorporation. This will help Evo subsidiaries maintain independent ranks if they are already a single- or double-A and provide them with increased asset value with which to hold rank, improve

rank, or just avoid being bought by another megacorporation. Some of these companies are breaking down even further into smaller subsidiaries to add more steps to the identification process and help focus the business and employment of each segment. Their efforts are leading to a lot of work identifying whether or not new players are actually new, part of Evo, or part of another corp looking to use the same strategy in order to avoid being downgraded by the Corporate Court. As long as Yamatetsu stays within the Evo primary corp, they've got their seat and can help out all their subsidiaries by divesting funds and value into the mix. Being at the bottom of the Big Ten still offers more power than being the biggest of the AAs.

THE MONAD MATTER

Whether you took their announcement seriously or not, the monads managed to cause enough of a ruckus to earn a giant bulls-eye on their back when they came out. Enough megacorporations took them seriously that efforts to work something out are actually progressing well.

That's the Corporate Court line. The truth is a lot uglier. People fear what they don't know, and people in fear do a lot of rash and irrational things. Attacks against suspected monads spiked after their ultimatum. Even under attack—as if the idiots stringing people up were attacking actual monads—they've kept an uncanny calm, in the hope of settling everything peacefully. The likelihood of that is nil, but at least all sides are trying to keep their business to the shadows for now, before they all inevitably pull out the really big guns and start taking potshots.

Evo is not among those corporations and is instead suffering from a rising tab of collateral damage as forces hired to handle the monad problem find their way to Evo controlled property in search of their quarry. The Evo philosophy of acceptance was quickly extended to the monads, and they've flocked to the megacorporation from all walks of life. These new citizens have been quickly assessed and then assimilated into some branch of the Evo corporate tree, usually R&D early on and then eventually over to a more permanent assignment. This is why Evo accepts the collateral damage tab.

Monads brought into R&D quickly provide Evo and their subsidiaries with valuable information on rival corporations, governments, crime syndicates, gangs, projects, financial data, or whatever they can before being assigned to their new jobs. Some return to the fields they appeared to have been in before in order to keep up appearances, while others transfer over to new areas where they try to build themselves a new life, and a rare few are rejected and sent back to the life they lived before, outside of Evo.

- Those rejects usually end up in the shadows or working for someone shady. Once they've bailed on their first life, it's tough to go back.
- Ma'fan

The first group is there to enhance their field and provide advancement cues and support to their teams. They often become the primary extraction target in their department. The second group are usually monads whose personalities or skill sets didn't match well with the original owner of the body and they need a new place to try to excel or find their niche. The last group is the one we'll deal with the most because they aren't rejected—they're sent back to wherever they came from in order to keep stealing secrets or gathering intel. Evo isn't just accepting all these poor monads out of the goodness of their heart. There's profit in it.

All of those new advancements are coming from monad minds, and Evo is looking to profit and save their megacorporate hoops by having an in with the group that has their finger on the nanopocalypse button.

- Hate to say it, but pulling in the monads could save them or it could doom them. Evo has some serious shake-ups at the top, so they've got leadership issues at the moment. They're struggling from all the nuyen they've spent to keep CFD from falling on their heads. They're letting this unknown group, who have already stated they want off this rock, use their resources to develop new tech. They're opening their doors to a group that still may have the potential to overwrite the minds of everyone they come across, and they're spreading them around the company. The more and more I list, the more and more I think Evo is making a mistake.
- Glitch

Hail to the Trinity! In the name of the Bull, the Glitch, and the unholy Slamm-0! Thank FastJack! Amen.

- And there's the burst of batshit!
- Haze

- I don't see the problem ...
- Slamm-0!

- Nor do I.
- Bull

- I'll play along. I don't see an issue either.
- Glitch

TOMORROW IS A MYSTERY

POSTED BY: SLAMM-0!

Despite Plan 9's prognostication skills, his rampant acceptance of coincidentally connected evidence was too much of a verbal vomit risk, so I got tapped for the future of Evo. That, and I really want to prove to Glitch

I actually put out useful stuff. While I could probably spew my speculations just like Plan 9, I'll limit my analysis of Evo's future to the effects of their rebranding, the future of the monad issue, possibilities on Mars, and their expansion into new regions.

A BRAND NEW EVO ... ERRR ... METASKINDUSTRIES

Evo will soon appear to be nothing more than a megacorporate logo with a grand humanitarian slogan about acceptance for all. They are losing huge amounts of Evo-branded assets as they umbrella down to separate from the Evo name in order for that name to take the brunt of the hit for the acceptance of monads, the nanite threat from the same, and the general fear and panic of building what most average people are whispering about as a doomsday ark. Though their brand recognition will be at the highest it has ever been, Evo will slip back and attempt to regain a positive image while their subsidiaries and new brands bring in the money. They'll be the one with the seat on the Corporate Court, but good luck tracking assets back to them.

For the shadow community it means an era of Evo fear that makes the days of the Renraku arcology look mild. That event was at least limited to Seattle—the monad nanopocalypse threatens the whole world. This means we'll be the primary source of operatives for all of Evo's black-book work until they get a deniable asset division up and running. This also means anyone running for them should consider it a possible job interview if they're interested. Tough part is going to be knowing that Evo is behind the job. Their subsidiaries are going to be handling their own black-book jobs in order to keep the break from Evo, and if it's Evo working to help a subsidiary surreptitiously it will look like a job for that subsidiary, rather than Evo, again in order to protect the subsidiary. Don't expect to see easily through the ruse, either. Evo is good at playing in the shadows.

- Darker corporate shadow ops like this also mean clean-up teams to make sure they stay quiet. You can expect tighter lips whenever it comes to runners who've been doing Evo

jobs. It's a decent tell if they're usually talkative, but it's also a warning that you're risking their life and yours by asking them too many questions.

- Thorn

This separation is also going to mean a lot more jobs against their subsidiaries and their main operations by other megacorporations trying to break them down and buy them up. Evo is taking a risk by pulling back, but it's a calculated risk to try to protect all of their operations from taking a hit. Their actions of late when dealing with the increase in attacks have been increasingly violent. The future is going to reveal a shift in their security standards, taking a lesson from MCT's playbook on site security, and their retaliations are going to be very Vory-inspired. Evo may be accepting of all, but they are also going to be indiscriminate in who they kill to protect their assets.

- This is a great place to point out that Evo has very interesting internal assets they could pull in to do wetwork, including spirits, AIs, shapeshifters, changelings, and metasapients. You name it, they've got it, and while many would think that the limited number of such individuals with whatever capability is in use may make tracking them down easier, that only works if Evo cooperates and lets investigations onto their property.
- Sticks

- Yay! More jobs from Lone Star and KE to drag people out in public so they can be arrested.
- Slamm-0!

- When do you ever drag anybody but your snotty kid out of anywhere?
- Clockwork

- And more jobs from Evo to grab them back or put them down.
- Balladeer

- The trail will only point back to Evo if Evo actually registers these assets with the new Global SIN system.
- Mr. Bonds

- Also of note is the fact that spirits don't have to hang out here on our plane. If they do something truly heinous and enough money gets thrown at the right people, runners may need to take a metaplanar jaunt to hunt them down.
- Frosty

- That's an extreme. How about the more realistic case of a shapeshifter simply going back into the wild? It doesn't matter how great a predator you are on the streets, out there you're prey.
- Winterhawk

We still have over a year before the departure of the Deep Space Exploration and Colonization I (DSECI) and whatever monads wish to go with it, but I'd like to look past that date and prognosticate on Evo in 2079 and beyond. Their efforts to take in the monads are paying off with tons of new tech and groundbreaking new techniques in every field. Some of this is due to the advanced mental capacities of many of the monads thanks to their AI nature and access to an organic supercomputer, but most of it is because they are receiving tons and tons of data and research from other megacorps through the monads they take in. They're getting access not only to the minds of the monads, but also to the minds and work of the top researchers at almost every other corp. All of that coming together means a lot of breakthroughs.

What everyone is wondering, though, is what happens when the DSECI leaves and Evo has done all of their corporate pillaging and now doesn't have all those monads. We'll be looking at a full-scale corporate shadow war to tear down Evo and disseminate or destroy all of the data they've collected. The advances that are already appearing are making huge leaps that the megacorporations can't afford. They need to control progress, just like they control everything else. While a few Corporate Court edicts would likely be enough, the Big Ten can't afford for the world to see them going after one of their own so soon after NeoNET takes its slap on the wrist for Boston. Instead, they'll call out the equivalent of a shadow Omega Order and let every corp go after Evo assets without restraint or repercussion.

Though this may sound great, it's going to do a lot more than just damage Evo. Evo represents acceptance around the world, and this many attacks against them is going to raise public questions about motive, and in the public, ignorance prevails. The attacks against Evo will be seen as a call to arms for anyone with an ounce of bigotry in them. Race wars will erupt, and while the megacorporations tear at Evo like coyotes on a carcass, metahumanity will start going after anyone that's different. It's an ugly future, but it's not an unlikely one.

- That's if all the monads leave, if they don't just hand the nano-collapse code over to Evo, if Evo's products don't revolutionize the market before then, if Evo doesn't grow and reconsolidate before then, if Evo doesn't buy off the other corps first, if Evo stays the other corps' main focus! The "if" list can go on and on.
- Plan 9

- That's the point of looking at the future. The "if" factor.
- Netcat

- But what's the plan to control the ifs?
- Nephrine

- I didn't want to add that when I wrote this up. Seemed more opinion than information.
- Slamm-0!

- All of this is opinion. It's the job of everyone here to sort out what's valuable. Feel free to add whatever.
- Glitch

- The solution seems pretty obvious. Support Evo. Try to keep them strong enough to prevent them from being an easy target when the time comes. If the time comes, don't take the work. Going after Evo will be like going after the concept of acceptance itself. I know the shadows are full of people who feel the world won't accept them, but not near as many as there are in the rest of the world who are already struggling with it on a daily basis. I have no particular love for Evo. I like how willing they are to accept all forms of life. I think that's a cause worth fighting for, or at least a cause worth not fighting against. We can also try to figure out how to control or stop this nano-collapse. It's a big fear, and if the shadows know how to control it we can both use it as a stick but also, and far more likely, stop it when someone gets the stupid idea that trashing the world back into the dark ages is a good idea.
- Sekretar

- Looks like we have an idealist among us. Welcome to the dreamsmasher, kid.
- Slamm-0!

- If we identify any corporation as our great hope in the fight for equity and acceptance, we have already lost. Acceptance, to them, will always come second to profit, meaning the principles can be ejected as soon as the money demands.
- Aufheben

When the ship leaves Mars, what does it mean for Gagarin, Mars, and efforts in our solar system in general? Usually runners don't need to concern themselves with events transpiring outside the atmosphere unless they have an account with Z-O, but the departure scheduled for next year is going to mean a lot of work on the ground, in orbit, in space, and possibly even on Mars in the near future. Leave it to Evo to make things interesting for everyone.

Dirtside, as the spacers call it, we'll be hitting every possible spot to get data on the DSECI's destination, plans, crew, cargo, etc. Roskosmos is doing a lot of coordinating with other subsidiaries to supply the ship with things it needs from Earth. While most things can be synthesized from the base resources of Mars, there are some things that need to be brought out. Though Evo has declared this is not an ark, they are sending plant seeds and a variety of animal embryos for the ship to take in the event it finds a planet that can be terraformed or one that supports life, but certain plant and animal life from home would be needed until the travelers have adapted to ingesting the local flora and fauna.

The need for seeds is a spot in Evo's plan that a lot of other corps are looking to exploit. They'll be hiring runners to get all sorts of things onto those shipments, from bombs to biohazards for sabotage and any possible tracking or surveillance device they can manage that they think will work from deep space. Their efforts are going to run the gamut. Runners will be dropping things into the mix from production, where it's the easiest, all the way to the spaceport, where their odds of success are slim to none.

When Halley's Comet came by back in the early '60s, most people just remember SURGE or the sudden orichalcum rush. The space race that took place has drifted into the past, even though most of the advancements made before Gagarin occurred during that time. The departure of the DSECI is going to kick off another race, and Evo will be doing their best to prevent anyone from getting much past the starting line. Other corps are going to try to follow in Evo's footsteps, and most are going to need data and research from Roskosmos in order to do that. Evo will be doing everything in their power to protect that info, but metahumanity is easy to predict, and money will prevail somewhere. Once it does, and it will happen more than once I'm sure, runners are going to be needed because Evo won't be able to do much complaining to the Corporate Court, and they won't want to risk using their own forces because the others will quickly gang up on them.

Off planet it's going to be interesting, as the Space Rescue Service will probably interdict an inordinate number of Roskosmos craft and will probably be slow to help any in distress. Evo is going to need extra security on all of their platforms and bases, and in order to create just the right amount of disinformation they'll use runners and let little bits of data accidentally slip into their hands.

Speaking of security, I didn't even point out the need for the dirtside security and escort teams. They're going to need runners in order to get key personnel to launch facilities, protect launch facilities from off corporate property as a first line of defense, run blinds with multiple vehicles to throw off attacks, and just about any other security op you can imagine. Using their own people would raise questions they aren't going to want to answer.

SEWING YAKUT

I'm so punny. I know I've focused a lot on the negative changes going on with Evo, but I'd like to finish off with something positive about their future. It has been years since Evo first sent representatives into the independent Awakened nation of Yakut to offer their corporate affiliation to the nation. The first visit went

EVO PRODUCTS (GAMEMASTER NOTE)

Creating a book full of Evo advanced products, even if they're just rumors or prototypes, is basically like asking to give every gamemaster that we love and respect a massive pain in the hoop. If it's in a book, someone is going to want it for their character, and with things like this, it would be quickly unbalancing. But creating a book and then saying that players can't ever have this is kind of shady as well, and while we write Shadowrun, we don't like being shady. So this little sidebar is a small compromise. A few ideas for things that can be given to major NPCs as you tell tales of Evo's efforts to advance mankind. Make sure the costs in nuyen, Essence, and/or Karma are appropriately high!

- Augmentation enhancements that go beyond the +4 Attribute Enhancement maximum.
- Augmentations that reduce Essence even less than deltaware.
- Drones with their own AI-like Pilot program, complete with advanced skills.
- A deck or RCC with higher attribute numbers than currently available decks.
- Movement enhancements for vehicles, drones, and NPCs.
- Psychokinetic abilities that allow technomancers or mundanes mental powers to move objects.
- The ability to copy any face through cyberware, bioware, geneware, or nanoware.

very poorly, with one disemboweled delegate and a response regarding a lack of knowledge of their customs. Since then, Evo has tried to learn from their mistakes. Their efforts have been slowed, to say the least, by their connections to the Russian government and their unhappiness that Evo was trying to work with a nation that cut their landmass in half. With Kirilenko out of the CEO spot and their relationship solid in Russia, they've begun looking to expand influence over all of northern Asia.

The fit with Yakut is perfect in the mind of Evo, but Yakut doesn't care about their open doors to all; they want to make sure that Evo isn't just coming in to plunder and pillage like corporate Huns. Evo needs as much cultural intel as they can get about Yakut, and in those efforts come the difficulties. Yakut doesn't have a single culture. They have the amalgamation of, and allowance for, all the cultures of their different inhabitants. It's part of their charm. It also means that Evo is going to need to learn about a lot of different cultures. The native Yakut are a complex people and probably the easiest of the cultures to learn. The cultures of every shapeshifter species vary, and you can guarantee that an orca or seal shifter will be present at the meeting to make sure Evo knows about everyone.

But Slamm-O!, why are you telling this to a bunch of uncultured shadowrunners? Because they are who Evo is going to send in to learn about the cultures, or protect the assets they have going in to learn about them. Yakut has already shown they have very few qualms about killing when they are slighted, and spying for a megacorporation would be a bit more of a faux pas than idly complimenting a wolf shifter's mate. That is what led to the gutting, by the way.

None of this sounds positive, right? Well the positive comes when Evo actually expands into a genuine Awakened nation of metasapients and helps to be the bridge between their knowledge and understanding of nature and magic and the rest of the world's understanding of technology and advancement.

HORIZON

"Slot off," Moss snapped, flashing a rude gesture to the dwarven Lone Star cop across the table from him in the interrogation room. "I want my lawyer."

The cop withdrew, muttering something about "spoiled trust-fund kids."

When the claustrophobic room's door finally cracked open again, a woman walked through as though she owned the place. A slender ork barely older than Moss, she wore a tight pencil skirt and an impeccably tailored blazer. Onyx chopsticks in her hair, black-rimmed eyeglasses, a black synthleather attaché case, and matching peep-toe stilettos completed the outfit.

Moss wasn't normally into orks, but this lady was *mega* hot. Like, Orxanne-level hot. "Who the hell're you? You're not my lawyer."

The ork slid in the seat across the table from him. "I am now, Mr. Mossberg," she said with a smug yet soft grin. "Call me Ms. Dawkins."

Moss noticed the Horizon sunburst pin on her lapel and grimaced. When had Dad hired Horizon lawyers? "Okay, so what's the big fragging deal with the cops hassling me like I'm some common criminal? I didn't do nothing."

Ms. Dawkins consulted her commlink and looked directly at him. Her eyes—a lovely shade of green, the color of orks in high-fantasy games—blinked slowly. "Start by telling me why you're here."

Moss shrugged and slouched back into his chair. "Dunno. Pigs think I witnessed a crime. But I didn't *do* nothing. *Swear*. They just get their kicks outta hassling rich kids."

Dawkins set her glasses next to her attaché and leaned forward with steepled fingertips. "Mr. Mossberg, I am your attorney. Anything you tell me falls under attorney-client privilege. Understand?"

He inhaled. If it'd get him off the hook, maybe telling the truth wasn't so bad an idea. "All right."

Moss launched into the story of how he had been in Downtown LA and witnessed a possibly drunken or chipped-out Aria Rage in an alley outside some club, beating the ever-loving drek out of some weird-looking kids—not something a nova-hot synthbassist does on a regular basis. He'd rushed in to keep her from killing people who'd probably only wanted her autograph, and that's when the Star had showed up.

The examination room fell dead silent. Ms. Dawkins said nothing for a good long while. Then she locked eyes with him again.

Blinked.

Inhaled.

Her eyebrows crinkled with skepticism. "Are you one hundred percent certain it was Ms. Rage? Are you *sure* it wasn't someone who just strongly resembles her?"

Moss dug a pinky into his ear and twisted at an itch he couldn't seem to reach. "Well ..." He went back through his memory. What *had* he seen? "Now that you mention it, her hair looked really different. I dunno. Maybe could've been someone else ...."

Ms. Dawkins blinked again, slowly. "So you *didn't* see Ms. Rage outside the club?"

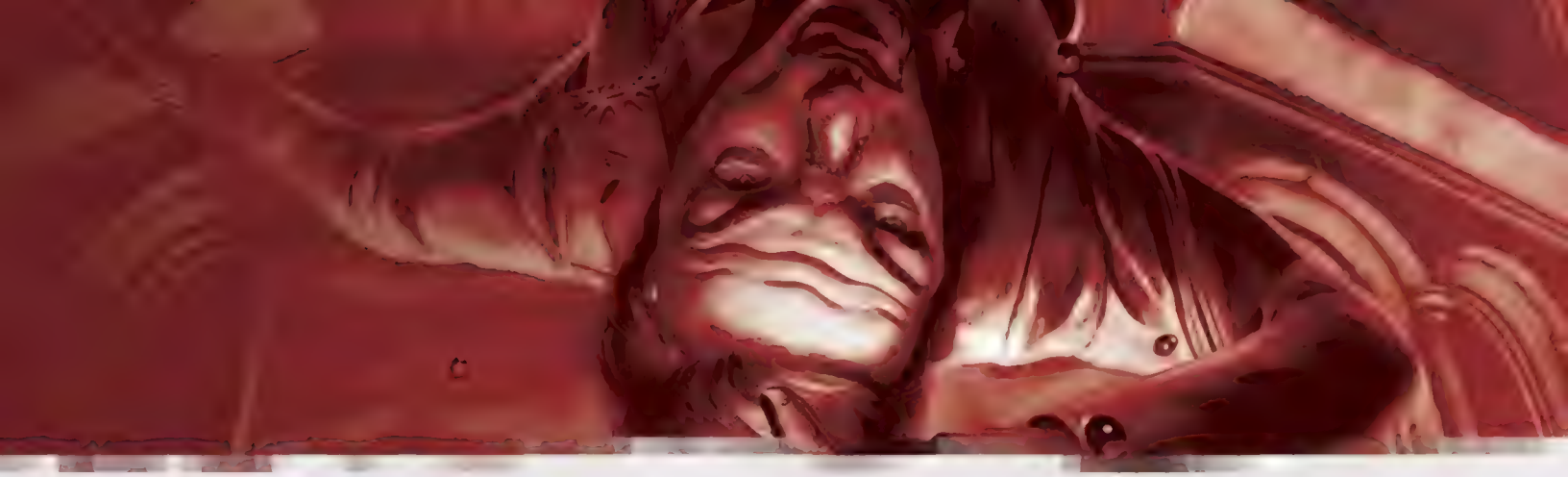
His memories seemed a jumble. Had he hit the bar a little too hard? "Maybe—maybe it *was* someone else.."

Dawkins leaned forward, closer, and took both of his hands. A charge of skin-on-skin contact electrified him with anticipation.

"*Listen to me*," she said, the timbre of her voice gravely serious. "You saw *nothing*." She squeezed his hands hard enough to leave bruises. "You saw a bunch of chipped-out kids doing stupid stunts. Nothing more."

Moss yanked his hands away from her and massaged them. The gruff dwarven cop sitting directly in front of him scowled in displeasure. What the hell was *his* deal? Geez.

"Look, officer," Moss said in as condescending a voice as he could manage. "I didn't see anything. What are you still hassling me for? I want my lawyer, or my father is going to have your fragging job."



HORIZON

Corporate Slogan: "We Know What You Think"
Corporate Court Ranking (2077): #10
Corporate Status: AAA, private corporation
World Headquarters: Los Angeles, PCC
President & CEO: Gary Cline
Major Shareholders: Undisclosed
Dominant Business Language: English
Secondary Business Languages: All

MAJOR DIVISIONS

Horizon Africa, Horizon Americas, Horizon Asia, Horizon Europe, Horizon Southeast Asia

NOTABLE SUBDIVISIONS

Bathotech (energy), Bio-Fine (biotech), Cantor-Kurosawa (media production), Charisma Associates (marketing/PR), Checkpoint Software (business software), Colbert Group (finance/legal), Columbia Industries (simsense), Common Denominator (fashion/consumer electronics), Cunard Entertainment (alternative entertainment), The Horizon Project (social works), Horizon Transglobal (space), KaleidoScape (software/sim), Olympus Designs (architecture/design), Pathfinder Multimedia (media/entertainment), Singularity (Matrix), Spectrum Holofix Entertainment Systems (electronics), Synergestic (ARE software), Truman Distribution Network (media/entertainment), Wanderlust (tourism)

SPINNING THE SPIN

POSTED BY: DR. SPIN

Ask anyone on any street in any sprawl in any city across the globe what they think about the Horizon Group, and eight or nine times out of ten you're going to hear only glowingly positive responses. Something Horizon did or touched either directly or indirectly helped one of these people in some tangible way: their kid got a decent education from some Horizon Project–subsidized school, or their aunt loves working at Horizon Subsidiary X, or they heard about some revolutionary charity that the corp is sponsoring. These people will be chock full of stories like that. If you manage to find someone who worked for the corp and got their walking papers for whatever reason, odds are they're still going to have nothing but good things to say about the corp: fun anecdotes about coworkers they miss seeing, personal projects they were incredibly proud of, the experience in their field they're glad to have gained—all kinds of positive, sick-to-your-stomach drek like that.

According to most straw polls you see for which AAA mega is the most accepting, friendly, progressive, or best to work for, Horizon would regularly tie with or outright trump Evo. However, since rumors now abound that Evo was responsible—or at least partially party to—the creation and/or outbreak of cognitive fragmentation disorder, Horizon has since gained a leg up in those polls. So far as the general populace is concerned, Horizon, the youngest member of the Big Ten, can do no wrong. And even when it *does* do wrong, a heartfelt we-couldn't-predict-the-consequences apology or quick blame reassignment goes a long way toward erasing Horizon's culpability in the court of public opinion.

Of course, look at any trid preacher for long enough, no matter how squeaky clean they appear, and you're going to find some dirt somewhere. Horizon might look pristine on the outside, but like the trid preachers asking for your donation, the Horizon Group has got some dirt of its own to hide. And the amazing thing about it is, they've been so frighteningly good at hiding and obfuscating that dirt that even the Big A can even take lessons from Horizon. This corp is who the spin doctors go for medical advice, so to speak. Their marketing and media departments are absolute masters of revisionist history, the kind of redactionists and re-framers that George Or-

well would've had wet dreams about. Were they so inclined, they could probably make the Night of Rage look like it was a fun, Metahumanity Ablaze-style affair and make people clamor for another one (thank Ghu that Humanis doesn't have deep enough pockets to afford Horizon). If you think that's hyperbole, it's not. *No one*, no matter how much they claim to be all about social responsibility and karma capitalism, should wield that kind of power or control over someone. No one. And that's what it's all about: control.

All corps want your money—hell, they'll outright steal it from you if they can get away with it—and Horizon is no exception. But while most megas will try to wheedle you out of your hard-earned nuyen any way they can, Horizon takes a different approach. Your average marketing campaign targets the innate greed and desire for immediate gratification of metahumanity: "You must have this *now*." More sophisticated campaigns try to sell based on intangible concepts like feeling better about yourself ("This will make you a better person") or being included in an exclusive clique ("Be one of the cool kids!"). But a Horizon ad campaign, by comparison? They go something along the lines of: "You must have this because it will make you one of the cool kids *and* make you feel better about yourself ... but why buy from our competitors when *x*-ty percent of the proceeds from this product will go toward building new homes and schools for underprivileged children in war-torn parts of Africa, Asia, and South America?" After that kind of spiel, after the sappy music, then you're probably already in tears and whipping our your commlink to hit up the website for said product.

- So what you're saying is, I probably shouldn't adopt that Amazonian orphan who was displaced by the Azt-Am War?
- Slamm-0!

Horizon doesn't try to steal your money—at least, not like the others. Instead they build a solid brand, tie it with social responsibility, put a nice, shiny bow on the package, and ask you to choose between a com-

petitor's product and "doing the right thing." When given a choice between Corp A, the corp known for, say, industrial polluting, and Corp B, known for its environmental-cleanup and conservation efforts, the decision for most folks is pretty easy. The scary thing is, everything Horizon puts in its marketing campaigns is legitimate. There are few actual lies to be found, if you can overlook the standard marketing hyperbole. Instead, Horizon just uses the right bait, makes you a Horizon-ophile, and convinces you to convert others if possible. This lack of overt lies might seem to indicate that Horizon is the real deal: a "good" corp that doesn't buy into the ubiquitous corporate values of greed and focusing on the bottom line no matter who gets hurt. The problem isn't that Horizon lies. What's more alarming is what Horizon chooses *not* to say—prevarication via omission. This is how the corp preys on the goodness of metahumanity under the guise of social responsibility. And social responsibility is how they get you, how they draw you in. They wallpaper beauty over the ugliness so that you forget about the black mold, about the roaches and rats living between the walls. So don't be surprised when the house collapses with you inside.

- Maybe I'm just obtuse, but how is social responsibility ever a bad thing? I'd like to help every single injured civilian I see in war zones, but I can't fight and render aid at the same time. And I don't really want the planet to become one giant drekhole, but I certainly can't fix the environment myself.
- Picador

- It's all a front. If Horizon says it's "helping [insert bleeding-heart cause] in [insert trendy national hot spot]," then you know they're (a) doing whatever it is they claim they are, and (b) doing something else shady on the side that relates to their cause du jour. So if they're feeding starving children in Amazonia, for example, they're probably also helping another corp test-market some new semi-toxic foodstuffs without having to worry about factoring in "acceptable losses," since no one's going to notice when a few starving people in a war-torn country shuffle off their mortal coils.

  If they're subsidizing a school in one of the poorer parts of the PCC, everything in that school is probably saturated with Horizon-related material. That means the curriculum, mascots, and extracurricular activities are designed in such a way that it makes the kids badger their parents for Horizon-branded products, or they'll be influenced in such a way that they'll want to work for Horizon when they get old enough.

  If Horizon is sponsoring the cleanup of industrial pollution, they're probably subcontracting the cleanup teams to do industrial espionage on behalf of some other company. One of the best ways to learn about someone is to sift through their garbage.

  And those are just top-of-the-head examples.
- Dr. Spin

- Surely not everything Horizon does is completely self serving.
- Sounder

- True altruism is a myth. Everyone gets something out of helping someone else (even if it's just the warm fuzzies).
- Haze

- Even supposedly benign causes will generally get your name in the news—doubly so if Horizon is footing the bill of said news—and sometimes that alone is the end goal. The old adage about there being no such thing as bad publicity is wrong: bad publicity is not having your name ever appear in the news. At the bare minimum, Horizon is guilty of wanting its name in as many headlines as possible.
- Sunshine

HISTORY

Let's get the 2,000-kilo behemoth out of the way: yes, Horizon is by far the youngest player in the AAA big leagues. In terms of actual founding dates, NeoNET is technically considered newer, but its execs and Frankensteined parts all came from megacorps with extensive pedigrees and long histories. Horizon, by comparison, just about came from nowhere. Odds are you probably have a teenager that's older than this AAA.

Horizon might be young, but bear in mind that even teenagers have the capacity to be dangerous. Remember that Pathfinder Multimedia trid series from a few years back, the one where the kid pulls a gun and geeks one of the secondary characters with no warning whatsoever because it turns out he was secretly a gangbanger? Yeah, Horizon's kinda like that kid, and the recent Las Vegas incident proves that—but more on that later.

Horizon began with a noble purpose in 2061, following the wake of Halley's Comet. Los Angeles was an utter wreck from the ravages of earthquakes and the Deep Lacuna alchera phenomenon. Hollywood was in the utter shambles, and the whole economy of the region—to say nothing of the LA-centric entertainment industry—was swirling down the toilet. To revitalize the city and get people back to focusing on fame and celebrity, a group of industry leaders and politicians banded together, ultimately leading to the creation of a think tank "social experiment" they called the Horizon Project. This group concentrated on improving LA, rebuilding the Hollywood economy, encouraging tourism, and being a generally friendly face amid a beleaguered city.

- As an example of how effective the Horizon Group's marketing and PR arm would ultimately become, back in those days, the Horizon Project managed to convince people to take the Deep Lacuna tour. Millions of tourists flocked to the city, and Horizon ultimately capitalized on scenes of human tragedy as though most of LA were Horizon's own twisted, for-profit Holocaust museum. Horizon spun the tour as a way of "keeping alive the memories of those who are no longer with us," or some such drek, but they were really catering to the disaster-porn and thrill-seeker crowds.
- Sunshine

- There's certainly no shortage of those types of people in the Sixth World.
- Cosmo

The Horizon Project's success in LA led to the think tank buying up smaller companies and eventually incorporating in 2063 as the Horizon Group and appointing sim-star Gary Cline as CEO. This newly certified A-rated megacorp started expanding its market share by snagging a lucrative PR deal with the government of Tír Tairngire and securing the contract to implement LA's wireless-Matrix initiative. The corp also invested venture capital in innovative and progressive startups, and acquired companies that would give them a competitive advantage against more entrenched megacorporate players. Horizon initially focused on intangible assets and services, such as advertising, media, entertainment, information services, software and Matrix development, and so on. The lack of overhead associated with the manufacture, storage, and distribution of physical products allowed Horizon to rake in the profits and (ostensibly) funnel a lot of those monies into public works projects, outreach programs, and other social responsibility endeavors that further elevated the corp's reputation in both the public and private sectors. With profits from its initial ventures, Horizon further diversified its markets by investing in more tangible products, such as pharmacology, biomedical research, politics, and architecture/urban development. Any company doing innovative or revolutionary work in their field became an acquisition target.

Crash 2.0 in 2064 caught the entire corporate world with their trousers around their ankles—everyone except Horizon. The corp's most critical Matrix nodes were offline for scheduled maintenance when the Winternight virus began wreaking havoc throughout the wired world. This freak coincidence—or masterfully executed plan, depending on whom you ask—let Horizon escape the ensuing chaos with very few scars. Corp operatives quickly jumped into the chum- and nuyen-filled waters and snatched up just about anything that wasn't tied down—small companies driven bankrupt by Crash 2.0; downsized employees left without jobs; stock portfolios; intellectual property rights, copyrights, patents, and other virtual assets—all for bargain-basement prices.

- In many cases, Horizon was able to make these purchases because no other potential buyer knew the items had ever been put up for sale. In some cases, Horizon approached flailing businesses and made them an offer before anyone else did. In other cases, it's believed Horizon-sponsored hackers deleted all traces of the item's availability on the market, leaving other potential buyers completely unaware the owner was looking to sell. Horizon's offers were often the first—and many times the only—bids the seller ever received, leading to the owner of the asset simply cutting their losses. In other instances, Horizon used social engineering to finagle assets from the estates of owners that didn't know the true value of what was being purchased.
- Mr. Bonds

In 2065, the Horizon Project's humble "social experiment" was catapulted into the ranks of the stardom when the Corporate Court announced that Horizon would replace the recently demoted remnants of Cross Applied Technologies in the ranks of AAA corporations. The pronouncement came as a shock to the other members of the Big Ten, leading to rampant discussion of how an upstart corporation like Horizon could climb from A to AAA in the span of only two years, especially since Horizon, on paper, only barely had enough assets and clout to qualify as AA-rated. To this day, no one but Gary Cline and the Corporate Court justices who presided over the decision know exactly how the decision came down. Speculation runs the gamut between things like undisclosed assets and Horizon hoarding a giant vault filled with potential blackmail for use against Corporate Court justices or bigwigs from other Big Ten members. Horizon's AAA rating has been challenged a few times by jealous AA-rated competitors, but the CC merely logs the complaints and dismisses the cases.

CURRENT EVENTS

Given the events of the last handful of years, it appears not even Horizon is as all powerful in the PR realm as we all originally thought. We used to see the corp as pretty much bulletproof, incapable of having enough aspersions thrown at it that people would stop to take notice and actually believe said allegations. In the halcyon days of the Horizon Group (ah, the late '60s ...), any negative press could easily be hand-waved away as if by divine fiat. Horizon's near monopoly of the press in many jurisdictions meant they could control all the information being released to the public, or their Charisma Associates PR gurus could put so much Horizon-positive spin on the story that the centrifugal force would make even the hardiest of astronauts throw up. Lately the mega has discovered the hard way that they can't just put a shiny coating of shellac on everything,

so their current strategy is to pump as much positive press into the airwaves and fiber-optic lines as they can and create public opinion via saturation.

FALLING STARS

One of the first cracks came in the form of the high-profile murder of Pathfinder Multimedia recording sensation Christy Daee. Investigations revealed that she and several other stars were killed by ex-cons from a Horizon-run prison who were undergoing an experimental rehabilitation program. Horizon's PR tried to downplay the Life Management Guide software as though they had little to do with it; however, one of Pathfinder's most lucrative performers was still dead, and no amount of PR could resurrect her. Horizon was unable to completely obfuscate its involvement in Daee's death, and many of her fans still blame the corp for her demise. Horizon's board claimed that their decision-making construct, known as the Consensus, had determined that the LMG beta test was ready; otherwise they would have waited another six months for further development.

Another crack in Horizon's impenetrable façade occurred during the Aztlan-Amazonia War. In 2073, the corp helped Amazonia wage a media campaign to tarnish Aztlan's reputation and swell worldwide support for Amazonia. Footage of Aztlan-perpetrated war crimes proved particularly damning, but the recording was later proven to be manufactured, and Horizon was left holding the (body) bag. Amazonia went from whipped underdog to mud slinger, and Horizon's involvement made Amazonia's eventual loss damage the corp's reputation all that much more. When faced with accusations of foul play, Horizon's board insisted the Consensus was responsible for the decision to alter the footage.

DENIAL OF SERVICE

The mega's most damning public misstep occurred during a technomancer protest in Las Vegas in 2074. This one bears a little explanation.

Since its inception, Horizon has been locked in competition with Evo for being the most progressive megacorporation, and Evo's stance toward technomancers and artificial intelligences prompted Horizon to quickly follow suit by granting citizenship and SINs to Horizon-employed virtuakinetics and AIs. Since their existence first became public, TMs have been hunted, dissected, and experimented on by corps like Mitsuhama, and AIs have received similar treatments on a digital level. Most TMs enjoyed working for Horizon, but those that didn't were fed a subtle kind of you'll-work-for-us-or-else line. Many who tried to seek employment with other corps found themselves blacklisted or unemployable, and they either were forced to return to Horizon or starve in the streets. The not-so-lucky got themselves captured or killed.

Eventually the technomancer community at large grew wise to Horizon's game. TMs across the world organized in protests against Horizon, claiming that this social-responsibility corp wasn't doing enough in the fight to secure global rights for TMs and AIs. Many members of the movement came to the realization that Horizon was merely paying lip service to the technomancer plight: the corp was more interested in exploiting virtuakinetic abilities for profit than actually advancing the technomancer agenda, which, ethically speaking, made them no better than corps that outright kill TMs in the name of research.

The protests outside the UN in Geneva fell on deaf ears, so the technomancer community quietly declared war on Horizon, going as far as infiltrating the LA offices and attempting to breach the Matrix protections around the Consensus construct. TMs then staged a massive protest in front of Horizon-owned casinos on the Las Vegas strip. They triggered mass Matrix blackouts and caused nearly every wireless-enabled device in the entire city to go haywire. Matters came to a head, and countless cameras captured footage of Horizon security using lethal force on the assembled technomancers. Once again, Gary Cline blamed the security personnel's decision on the Consensus. (Are we noticing a theme yet?) That explanation alone, however, could not protect Horizon from the vilification that followed.

- There's an endless string of virtuaphobic wannabe deckers who'll bend your ear with blatant lies about how they "singlehandedly hacked the Consensus" so they could "stick it to the Man" and trigger the technomancer massacre. I will go on record by saying no shadowruns were responsible for the Consensus's decision to execute the Las Vegas technomancers. Horizon did that to itself.
- Icarus

- Up to this point, Horizon security would generally opt for nonlethal takedown methods. Corps are well within their legal rights to defend their own property, but this was especially out of character for Horizon. For many people throughout the world, this massacre was a definitive look at the fangs hiding behind the smile.
- Hard Exit

- The Dawkins Group has never been above using lethal force.
- Sunshine

CONSENSUS 2.0

If you've been paying attention to these last few foibles, you've probably figured out that, at some point over the last six years, the Consensus completely jumped its rails. Here's how it happened and what Horizon has implemented to ensure it (probably) won't happen again.

THE LONG SLIDE INTO DARKNESS

Horizon's board makes all of its decisions based on feedback from the Consensus data construct. The first few batches of bad advice simply came via metahuman error: The Consensus probably polled Horizon employees by asking, "How important is it that inmates be rehabilitated before being released from prison?" and the rest is history. In the Consensus's defense, the concept of prisoner rehabilitation meshes perfectly with Horizon's commitment to social responsibility, so the decision made sense at the time, as no one could have predicted the method of rehabilitation would result in murder. But as time went on, the Consensus started taking darker turns. Horizon's culture initially adopted the "What's good for the world is good for Horizon" mentality, which the Consensus adopted. However, over time, Horizon's employees began to buy into their own PR, and that ideological shift resulted in a culture more inclined to think that "What's good for Horizon is good for the world." The Consensus's absorption of this shift is part of what led to questionable acts that seemed to betray the principles the corp stood for. Essentially what happened is once the public started noticing Horizon's too-good-to-be-true luster begin wearing away, Horizon employees started responding to the Consensus poll questions with answers that echoed their individual frustrations, which led the Consensus down an unexpectedly dark path.

- This is absolute basic computer science, people. GIGO: garbage in, garbage out. You take a giant database aggregation algorithm—which is essentially what the Consensus is—and throw a bunch of negative data into it, you're going to get negative results. Horizon's board should've known such a thing was possible. The Consensus was poorly engineered and ultimately doomed to fail.
- Clockwork

- I can't decide what's worse: (a) Horizon possessing such lofty, altruistic goals that it couldn't fathom how its infallible Consensus could ever go wrong, or (b) the board knowingly following the Consensus even though they had to know what it was telling them was a really bad (and unethical) PR move.
- Pistons

- That's like having a faulty GPS telling you to turn left, but you can see a big lake there right where the map is telling you to turn, and you turn anyway because you trust what the GPS tells you. When your car sinks into the lake, blaming your GPS isn't going to keep your head above water.
- Clockwork

- Yeah, people should know better than to trust a strange computer.
- Slamm-0!

ETHICS CALCULUS

To prevent such negative and damaging decisions from occurring in the future, Gary Cline ordered the Consensus taken offline and reengineered from the ground up. In a bold but risky PR move, Cline offered restitution to the families of the slain technomancers and recruited many of Horizon's technomancer citizens to help find and correct the algorithms responsible for endorsing the Vegas massacre. Horizon also offered public *mea culpa*s to the technomancer community, which included allowing Horizon-employed technomancers to freely resign and defect elsewhere, without consequence. Though this led to a mass exodus of virtuakinetics from the mega—largely from Singularity, Horizon's Matrix subdivision—a good many chose to remain with Horizon.

- I'd bet nuyen to noodles that Horizon's kept a giant database of all the TMs who left their employ. Y'know, for insurance purposes.
- Glitch

- What's to say they're not still working for Horizon as industrial spies, and their defection wasn't just some cleverly staged media ruse?
- Dr. Spin

According to intercepted interoffice memos, the recently unveiled Consensus 2.0 was engineered with various ethical safeguards in place. Central to these improvements are a new set of internal laws that hearken to Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics (but replace "human" with "Horizon"). Scores are also now weighted based on a poll respondent's Internal Persona rating, which means the opinions of someone with a good reputation among peers will factor much higher in the aggregate than people who don't. Add in some sort of esoteric "ethics calculus"—whatever the frag that actually means—and you've got a surefire way to have the Consensus *not* advocate decisions that would lead to murdering POWs or technomancers. Rumor has it that Horizon's board of directors also incorporated a final failsafe measure by modifying its bylaws so that, in the event of an "ethics calculus" failure, the board can veto a Consensus decision by a two-thirds majority vote.

- Which, mark my words, will eventually go a long way toward neutering the Consensus in favor of board actions. You may decide for yourself if that is a good or a bad thing.
- Mr. Bonds

TABULA RASA

My sources inside the corp claim one of the unforeseen prerequisites for bringing Consensus 2.0 online was this new system necessitated a global reset of every single employee's Horizon Internal Persona score. Even though employees were prepared for the change, utter chaos resulted behind Horizon's all-too-cheerful façade. Everyone, even Gary Cline, dropped to a flat zero, which threw the corp's organizational paradigm into complete disarray. Unsurprisingly, the board members all kept their seats, but team and project leadership positions, whose appointees were dictated by HIP rating rather than seniority or any other criteria, remained in such constant flux that many projects flailed without direction. The new Consensus chose to freeze appointment to these positions until HIP has been around long enough to mature into a more stable system of leadership metrics.

- A funny thing about equality: Everyone being rated five (out of five) stars is no different than an across-the-board one-star rating. But in a one-star world, the 1.5-star rating is king.
- Kay St. Irregular

Another thing to keep in mind is the Consensus and HIP resets required the deletion of a large amount of ancillary data for Internal Persona records. No one is quite sure what exactly fell victim to this data purge, but most hypotheses believe every single employee's emails, voicemails, recorded conversations, and so on were dumped through some kind of ethics filter, and documents containing negative or outright incriminating content were either sanitized or deleted. Others believe only legacy data, such as the employee's basic HR information file and the like, was retained, and everything else was tossed in the virtual incinerator—a true clean slate. The former is more likely, but Horizon may be just desperate enough to have gone with the latter route.

- Has Horizon forgotten about the Deep Resonance? What is deleted is never truly gone.
- Netcat

- This HIP-score reset is still in its early stages, so if you've got creative social-engineering skills and can work enough people to up-vote you (or your chosen stooge or patsy), they'll eventually get promoted to a team/project lead, creating the perfect inside man. But wait too long, and the HIP scores will approach their former levels, and you (or your stooge) will never reach a leadership role naturally.
- Sunshine

- Those of you with a forged Horizon ID and/or a falsified HIP score are best off just chucking your ID and getting a new one made. Horizon security is going to look at you real funny if your ID shows a HIP score that's levels of magnitude higher than everyone else's.
- Mika

PLAYING WITH FIRE(ARMS)

One of Horizon's most recent developments, and arguably the one that most helped the corp get back onto its feet after the Las Vegas debacle, is the partnership deal it struck with Ares Macrotechnology. A good part of Horizon's success during its infancy derived from its PR deal with the Tír Tairngire government, and the corp's experience running marketing and PR campaigns for national governments and A- and AA-rated megas has made Horizon a global contender in the making-people-look-good industry. However, to our knowledge, Ares is the very first AAA to court Horizon's services.

Ares Arms manufactured the Excalibur battle rifle, a gun so bad that its horrid reputation spilled over into every single Ares-branded subsidiary the corp owned. Sales were tanking across all industries and in every market Ares maintained a presence. Enter Horizon's PR magicians, their "reputationists extraordinaire." They partnered with Ares to create a radical rebranding strategy and a plan to help the consumer public wash the aftertaste of the Excalibur out of their collective mouth. New logos, color schemes, and brand names drew many buyers back to the Ares fold, but not all. It is believed the Dawkins Group was involved in guerrilla marketing campaigns and strong-arm tactics for the most recalcitrant markets.

The scary thing about this partnership is no one is quite sure what this level of service cost Ares and what Horizon stood to gain from it. Some of the conditions of the partnership have since been uncovered—for example, minor concessions such as Ares not badmouthing competing Horizon products in their marketing campaigns—but not all. It's likely Horizon negotiated the deal for various markers and larger concessions we don't yet know about.

- One of those markers is letting them exploit Ares's budding relationship with the CAS government. Horizon is looking to expand into Atlanta with a righteous vengeance, and Ares is the easiest way to pave those inroads.
- Sticks

- Please tell me we're not going to start seeing fancy, cheerful-looking guns with Horizon's logo stamped on them ...
- 2XL
- Or worse, they could be pink.
- Turbo Bunny

RENDER UNTO CAESAR

One of the biggest shockers to the corporate world was the recently announced Megacorporate Revision. With the Corporate Court auditing each AA-rated megacorp to re-evaluate their extraterritorial status, the corporate "middle class" is running scared and scrabbling to gain any advantage that might ensure their standing.

Horizon, being a AAA mega with a seat on the Corporate Court, is technically immune to the Revision, but many jealous AA corps who have in the past tried to challenge the AAA rating believe Horizon's actual on-paper assets are much less than their lofty rank indicates. With the audit announcement, these spurned corps—or perhaps even a consortium of AAs—will likely pay runners a premium to uncover Horizon's true worth, expose the corp's lie to the public, and then issue the Corporate Court an ultimatum. Such a dethronement from the Big Ten is a long shot, but long shots obviously never keep the determined from trying.

The announcement of the megacorporate audit must have made Cline & Co. very nervous because scant weeks later, Horizon bought up several A-rated corps such as Checkpoint Software, the Colbert Group, and Spectrum Holofix. From the look of things, it seems Horizon is trying to further increase its diversification of services, solidify its market share, and augment its power base. That means folks like us can expect to get a lot of business from Horizon-backed Johnsons in the immediate future.

HORIZON: ONE BIG, HAPPY FAMILY

If I was writing this for any other megacorp, I'd draft separate sections for corporate structure and culture, but with Horizon, it's a little hard to do when considering the two are inextricably linked.

WELCOME TO THE ECHO CHAMBER

Those of you unfamiliar with Horizon probably assume it's got the same top-down board-to-boss-to-employee structure as pretty much every other megacorp out there, but you'd be wrong. Instead it's more of a meritocracy where everyone strives to earn gold stars, and the person with the most gold stars gets to run the show.

- I'd amend that by saying that it has more of the appearance of a meritocracy, and even some of the mechanisms of a meritocracy, but as long as people are willing to advance

on something other than merit, they will attempt to twist systems to their own end, and they will advance on elements other than merit. Horizon's system is not invulnerable, since no system is.

- Sunshine

Horizon is unique in that it is, in essence, a self-perpetuating feedback circle. The only truly semi-permanent members of the corp's leadership are the board members, and even those could be replaced at the owners' whims. But on the other hand, unlike most corporate boards of directors, Horizon's board doesn't just hash out the issues and then vote on decisions. Instead, they look to the Consensus, especially when it comes to the really hard decision. And what *is* the Consensus? Well, it's the aggregated opinions of Horizon employees, fed into extremely complex matrices that are fed through various algorithms and essentially act as the board's digital conscience. So when you boil it down to a nice reduction, the board takes its cues directly from the employees, who in turn take their direction from the decisions made by the board. In some twisted, roundabout way, the employees of Horizon, even down to the lowly wageslaves, are their own bosses.

- That explains the relaxed, laissez-faire approach to the Horizon work ethic and management style: everyone, in a sense, acts as though they are self employed.
- Cosmo

While such a cycle sounds bad in theory, it actually meshes well with Horizon's notions of Indian karma capitalism, in that positive effort reaps positive rewards. This philosophy of doing business feeds into Horizon's three corporate values: Social Consciousness (ensuring projects don't harm the environment or metahumanity), Workplace Synergy (fostering a collaborative, creative, and positive work environment for all employees), and Philanthropic Profitability (raking in enough money to reinvest in making the world a better place). The idea is that, if you put in positive effort by protecting society and the environment, making investments in your workers, and improving the world in general, then you'll reap positive rewards in the form of greater profits and a better world for future generations.

- I must not have read that right. How exactly does killing technomancers and POWs fit into those three values?
- Netcat

SMILING YOUR WAY TO THE TOP

Another intriguing facet of Horizon's structure is the way people are hired and promoted within the corp. If you want a job at Horizon, you don't go doing a Matrix search in the classifieds. Instead you just send Horizon your résumé and fill out this weird little questionnaire (the questions, interestingly enough, hearken to the kind of Consensus instant-poll opinions that Horizon employees get throughout their work day). The HR folks first evaluate the applicant's questionnaire by feeding it into some kind of Consensus-lite module, which is a quick-and-dirty litmus test for whether the applicant's temperament and work ethic are a good match for Horizon's atmosphere. If they pass that, then the HR rep peruses the résumé to see if the candidate possesses skills in any currently needed positions within any of the corp's subsidiaries. If they find a match, then congrats: You're hired. If there are no available positions, they'll keep your info on file and let you know the instant a job frees up.

- That's not an exaggeration. Back when I was first trying to investigate Horizon, they had my resume on file for a good six months before offering me a job. I literally got my offer around 0230, when I was trying to sleep before a big job. And as they say, nothing good ever happens after 2 a.m.
- Sunshine

- It's always after 2 a.m. somewhere.
- Slamm-0!

Once you get hired on, you'll be introduced to the Horizon Internal Persona system. For the uninitiated, this is similar to social-media systems used in largely in North American cities, but only Horizon employees have access to it. Employees use it to easily communicate with their team members, managers, and even with employees from other Horizon subsidiaries without having to worry about the kind of bureaucratic red tape you'd expect at other corps. The soy-and-potatoes of the HIP system, though, is the rating system, whereby any employee in the whole corp can rate any other employee. For example, it's completely plausible for a graveyard-shift janitor in some Horizon Africa subsidiary to up- or down-vote Gary Cline, and vice versa, but he'd have to specify a reason, even if it was something that might seem superficial to most people. Things like remembering a coworker's kid has an upcoming birthday or offering a firm, confident handshake are all valid, as are having a bad haircut, voicing a disliked opinion, or wearing too much perfume. But votes lacking specific, justifiable reasons get discarded by the system, so saying "I just don't like this person" won't work. Granted, CEO-to-janitor interactions don't happen terribly often, but the openness built into the system encourages Horizon folk to always be aware that someone might be watching your actions, which means you can get thumbs-ups and thumbs-downs from literally anyone in the IP network at any time.

- Bear in mind that if you're trying to infiltrate Horizon by working the system, you need to always be on your best behavior, even when you're not technically on the clock. One time I saw some coworkers while out at a bar, and they all down-voted my HIP score because I didn't say "hi" to them. Because of that, I got booted from my team lead position over a promising research project, one I was hoping would lead to access to even more sensitive projects. Remember what I said about this not being a pure meritocracy? This is a good example.
- Sunshine

Once you've landed your cushy new Horizon job, if you strive to do more than just the daily, same-drek-different-day drudgery of an entry-level job, then you've got to get people to like you. I know that might be a problem for some of you more unlikable or aesthetically challenged folks, but all that really matters is the *trying*. Sitting there all day, wearing frumpy, wrinkled clothes, and grousing is a surefire way to damn yourself to the lowest circles of Horizon's own particular version of hell. But if you put on a halfway decent outfit, maybe smile once in a while, try to make friends, and do a good job, then your Internal Persona score will get an occasional bump. But if you can really turn on the charm, reinvent your wardrobe, *and* excel in your work, then you'll be on your way to management in no time.

However, this being Horizon, managers aren't really hired in the traditional sense, the kind of hiring where the people over the position review a slate of candidates and choose which one would be the best fit. In Horizon, though, the person who manages a team or a project is the person within that group whose HIP score is currently the highest among their group. That means the boss you have one week might be your peer the next. If he does a bad enough job as a team leader, you and your team can down-vote him, and the team member with next-highest HIP score takes the seat.

Since there would be absolute chaos if everyone changed desks whenever a new frontrunner emerged within a team, leadership positions tend to be held for a minimum of two weeks to allow for smooth transitions and continuity. Middle and upper management can also delay a leadership change if, for example, a project is in a critical phase and new direction mid-stream would divert the river too far off its original course.

Currently, due to the HIP reset, leadership positions are expected to remain static for at least a fiscal quarter.

THE UPPER ECHELON

Most leadership and management positions within Horizon are open to those who qualify for them, but the few at the top level are the exceptions. Compared to the rest of the corp's organizational methodology, the uppermost leadership of the Horizon Group looks rather typical and mundane. Like most corporations, the global headquarters revolves around your standard board of directors, which consists of a chairperson and the vice presidents of the corp's regional divisions and its major subdivisions.

Regional division and subdivision VPs all maintain a team of advisors called fellows. Unlike other lower positions, empty VP slots are voted on by the board rather than being automatically filled by employees with the highest HIP ratings in their section. This is done to preserve a continuity of overall leadership. VP candidates are generally chosen from among the previous VP's fellows.

One of the most notable aspects of Horizon's corporate hierarchy is the unprecedented level of integration and cooperation between divisions and subdivisions. For example, Singularity might be based in CalFree, which falls under the aegis of Horizon Americas, but if a company in Lagos wants Singularity's services, Horizon Africa works directly with Singularity to make that happen, and Horizon Americas coordinates with both just to ensure things go smoothly on both ends. The routine amount of *Brazil*-level red tape that other corps deal with is strangely absent, meaning that if the janitor from Horizon Africa really needs to speak directly to Gary Cline for some reason, he won't have that many hoops to jump through.

NOTABLE SUBDIVISIONS

Unlike many megas, all of Horizon's subdivisions are wholly owned by the Horizon Group. So keep in mind that when you're in one of these offices, you'll interact with Horizon citizens, face Horizon security, and be subject to Horizon law.

CHARISMA ASSOCIATES

Vice President: Rael WhiteOak
Headquarters: Portland, Tír Tairngire

Of all Horizon's divisions, Charisma Associates is the one most responsible for Horizon's trademark spin. If you want people to buy your products, throw money at your political campaign, pay attention to your message, cover up your horrible gaffe, or maybe even make the public forget about you for a while, these are the people you want to call. They're not for everyone, though: Charisma reps often pursue unorthodox, viral approaches which might unsettle those too entrenched in the traditional (i.e., antiquated) way of marketing and public-relations thinking.

CA's methods might seem unusual, but their track record speaks for itself. For example, CA has on several occasions run simultaneous advertising campaigns for directly competing products, and both clients have still seen sales spikes instead of only the "better" product coming out ahead.

- More importantly, Charisma Associates is also in the business of "anti-PR," which usually involves rumormongering and scandal manufacture. For example, the Teiko Ikemoto underage pregnancy scare, which cropped up near the height of her popularity? That has Charisma's fingerprints all over it.
- Mihoshi Oni

- Probably, but Charisma doesn't like to get its hands dirty, especially after the Las Vegas incident. Odds are the Teiko Ikemoto job was handled by deniable assets, not Charisma proper.
- Sunshine

Charisma Associates is also largely responsible for generating and applying the market-trend analysis Horizon is world famous for. Even the AAAs are jealous of their ability to create and predict market trends (although they'd never admit it publicly), so Horizon makes a killing selling subscription access to their predictive models and market-research data. Charisma market-research specialists claim their ability to predict shifts and trends in the buying public is simply a matter of being able to read people (and thus insinuating that other corps just don't understand metahumanity). More Charisma Associates employees are targeted for involuntary extraction than from any other Horizon subdivision, but grapevine tales tell of ex-Charisma employees who inexplicably lose their predictive talent after being extracted.

- Consumers are creatures of habit, so Horizon's ability to create a market trend strong enough to shake consumers out of their purchasing rut is, in my opinion, a far more impressive feat than merely making a forecast on the market.
- Mr. Bonds

The good news for folks in our line of work is Charisma Associates hires more runners than any other Horizon branch by far. If you're good at staying out of sight and out of mind, these are the people you want to work

for, as they prefer stealthy, leave-no-trace jobs rather than the guns-blazing variety.

THE HORIZON PROJECT

Chair: Gary Cline
Headquarters: Los Angeles, Pueblo Corporate Council

Although they've come far from simply trying to fix LA's post-comet problems, the Horizon Project of today is what remains of the original think tank that eventually became the Horizon Group. Given the Project's current representation in Horizon's corporate dynamics, you'd be surprised that nowadays it has very little bearing on overall corporate leadership or direction. The Horizon Project has no presiding VP, no fellows, no seat on the board, and Gary Cline, as CEO and chairman—sorry, chair*person*—of the board, is merely the Project's de facto leader.

At first blush, the project seems to be little more than a nonprofit organization that pursues humanitarian and grassroots efforts rather than acting as a division of a for-profit AAA megacorp. Think "community political organizer meets UCAS Peace Corps and Habitat for Metahumanity," and you'll get an idea verging on what they're all about these days. The Project offers its services to organize things like town halls and focus groups and basically reinforce the corp's face of social responsibility. One of its most successful programs involves anti-cult work, including cult investigation, exit strategies, and deprogramming expertise.

- Can you imagine what would've happened had the Horizon Project been around during the Universal Brotherhood days?
- Pistons

- Easy.The Project investigates UB, has no clue what they're dealing with, and then all of its members get unwittingly sucked into the conspiracy as flesh forms. At their request, Charisma Associates spins the UB up a frighteningly effective marketing and PR campaign, and then the whole world becomes like one of those robots-destroy-humanity trid flicks, only with insect spirits instead of robots.
- Sticks

- Eh, I'd watch that movie.
- Slamm-0!

The global public has nothing but good things to say about the Horizon Project, which is why its parent corp has been pimping it wherever and whenever it can ever since the Las Vegas incident. After the foibles of the past few years, Horizon is attempting to buy back the public's trust via goodwill, even more so than before. And the scary thing is, it seems to be working—at least in certain parts of the world. Aztlan, for example, still won't allow any Horizon Project-affiliated groups to operate inside its borders, and Amazonia has likewise turned a cold shoulder even at Horizon-funded humanitarian aid, but when single mothers in a sprawl ghetto see the Horizon Project striving to make their lives a little bit better, they couldn't give two dreks about some technomancers who got killed by making too much noise.

Two of the largest divisions within the Horizon Project are Internal Intelligence and the Social Science Auxiliary Corps. Internal Intelligence appears to be a feedback unit designed to evaluate Horizon employees on a scale far more invasive than just a HIP score. This group is concerned with effectiveness and loyalty, and one of their goals is to sniff out moles or flag problem employees before they become extraction targets and take sensitive trade secrets with them.

The SSAC, on the other hand, is a humanitarian organization of social scientists—anthropologists, economists, and other -ists from the soft sciences—that works in trouble spots alongside militaries, be they of national, corporate, peacekeeping, or mercenary troops. On paper the Auxiliary Corps's goal is to offer advice meant to limit civilian casualties and preserve social and cultural infrastructure, but behind the Horizon prestidigitation lie for-profit nation-building efforts. By using the SSAC, Horizon is essentially capitalizing from war by creating and supporting nations ripe for Charisma Associates to swoop in and sign up as PR clients.

HORIZON TRANSGLOBAL

Vice President: Mark Stregatta
Headquarters: Las Vegas, Pueblo Corporate Council

Transglobal oversees Horizon's aerospace assets—which consist mostly of media and telecommunications satellites—but that's not what's so important about it. Forget bothering to compare it to other aerospace giants like Ares, Evo, or Saeder-Krupp: Transglobal is small even when placed next to every other Horizon branch. So why does it warrant a VP and a seat on Horizon's board? No one knows, and digging below the surface has yielded only strange call-outs to something referred to only as DAR, to which Transglobal shunts a good portion of its funds.

One of the most common theories is that DAR is a secret project intended for the future construction of a Horizon space habitat. This seems consistent with the current state of Horizon's space presence. Transglobal has recently pulled out of the space-station offices and quarters Evo had been renting them, and the cost of building and maintaining even a small Horizon-owned space habitat would save money in the long run. If Evo were to discover this is the real reason for Transglobal's departure, Vladivostok would not be happy.

- I can confirm thatTransglobal is definitely not donating to Daughters of the American Revolution.
- Slamm-0!

- DAR is code for some kind of spy network embedded in their telecom sats. If it's not, then I'll eat my collection of Cline sims.
- Kia

- Is it true that Transglobal abandoned the Evo habitats because they feared association with a potential CFD vector would even further tarnish Horizon's reputation?
- Glitch

In other recent developments, Transglobal seems to have completely decommissioned its Mojave launch facility and instead has begun relying on the more economical use of the Kilimanjaro mass driver instead. Transglobal likely used the Mojave facility to avoid the often exorbitant wait for launch windows on the shared mass driver, but it's possible that maintenance of the facility had simply become too cost inefficient.

PATHFINDER MULTIMEDIA

Vice President: Uniqua M'tobi
Headquarters: Los Angeles, Pueblo Corporate Council

All of Horizon's various media empires fall under the Pathfinder Multimedia umbrella, which is by far the most globally recognized Horizon brand. These days, if you watch a news channel, download a trid movie, listen to music, slot a simsense chip, attend a physical or virtual concert, or take a virtual vacation, odds are pretty good that most of those things were produced by Pathfinder.

One of Pathfinder's hot ticket items these days are legally produced CalHots, simsense chips with peak levels higher than the norm without going into full-on illegal, synapse-destroying BTL territory. These are all the rage in CalFree, and Pathfinder is helping them finding their way to sprawls across North America and beyond, much to the dismay of Pathfinder's primary competitor Amalgamated Studios. The California Collection, one of Pathfinder's most popular CalHot lines, offers a plethora of classic Pathfinder simsense recordings with levels tweaked up to CalHot standards.

- So we're now calling sims released about a decade ago "classic"?
- Slamm-0!

- I'm guessing CalHotted Gary Cline flicks are all the rage right now?
- Kia

- Pathfinder's VP, Uniqua M'tobi, is also a former simstar, so her CalHots are just as popular as Cline's these days.
- Turbo Bunny

VP M'tobi's current dilemma revolves around the Truman Distribution Network. Horizon acquired TDN from Ares five years ago but kept it as a discrete entity under Pathfinder Multimedia rather than absorbing its assets into its newsmedia department. Once the buyout was complete, TDN founder Daniel Truman was expected to defect from Ares and assume control of TDN for Pathfinder, and Horizon expected to leverage the well-known brand identity in the market. However, for reasons unknown, Truman has remained with Ares, which has M'tobi and her fellows advocating the complete absorption of TDN into the Pathfinder brand.

SINGULARITY

Vice President: Juneau Estes
Headquarters: San Francisco, California Free State

On the surface, Singularity is a Matrix environment and software developer, but its full purpose goes far beyond that. At its basest level, Singularity serves as the IT department for the entirety of Horizon. No matter what Horizon division you work for, the entire back end of your operation, from HIP votes to project management software, server storage, and so on is all run and managed by Singularity.

Products and services for clients include secure data storage, Matrix design, virtual school software, information brokering, automatically updated "living" 'softs, and the wildly successful Automated Crime Prevention System that first debuted in LA. Singularity was also developing a behavioral modification suite intended to rehabilitate dangerous criminals in Lone Star–run prisons, but the failure of the beta testing, which led to the murders of Pathfinder Multimedia pop star Christy Daee and sim star Whyte Nyght, rendered the program vaporware.

Most of Singularity's initial success in the Matrix market stemmed from the brilliance of former VP Tam Reyes, a gifted MIT&T grad and confirmed technomancer. However, Reyes angrily resigned in the aftermath of the Las Vegas technomancer massacre, and many other Singularity-employed virtuakinetics also jumped ship along with him. His replacement on the board, Juneau Estes, is a relative unknown. Such a high-level position would normally prompt promotion from within the corp, but there is no record of her having worked for Horizon before being given a seat on the board.

- Last I heard, Singularity is still having a hell of a time attracting good, reliable Matrix talent to fill the vacuum Reyes left. Anyone interested in landing a "legit" Matrix job inside the Horizon firewall—for whatever reason—might want to look into this.
- Glitch

- What I've found interesting is no one seems to know where Reyes disappeared to. It's like he just dropped off the face of the planet.
- Sunshine

- That's not entirely improbable. Plenty of room up here in the clouds for someone like him to get lost in.
- Orbital DK

THE DAWKINS GROUP

Director: Unknown
Headquarters: Unknown

Last but certainly not least is the Horizon department you won't find on the books anywhere, the closest equivalent Horizon has to a spec-ops division. What sets this group apart from, say, Renraku Red Samurai, Aztechnology Shorn Ones, or Tír Ghosts is they believe wholeheartedly that the pen is stronger than the sword. Although each Dawkins Group agent undoubtedly has the capacity to be a stone-cold killer when necessary, these folks primarily work in two different modes, neither of which requires physical weapons except when things have taken a seriously wrong turn.

The first mode involves hunting down memes—ideas, catchphrases, slogans, ideologies, iconography, sound bites, potential slander/libel, and so forth—that Horizon deems either a direct threat to the corp or a general danger to a specific community. Once such a threat has been recognized, Dawkins agents will exercise everything in their power to find and destroy this meme before it can cause further damage. A recent example of this is a editorial-style cartoon depicting Gary Cline as an action-star persona murdering defenseless technomancer kids on the Vegas Strip with glee in his eyes. Oh, you haven't seen it? Neither have most people. Dawkins folks silenced the artist somehow and scoured every single trace of the image from the Matrix. The only way I can prove that this cartoon even existed is if I pull a copy from my offline storage, and if I do that, I expect that copy will also vanish in very short order.

Given the nature of these meme-hunting assignments, the Dawkins Group is believed to often work in close conjunction with Charisma Associates. Where Charisma is responsible for propagating the messages their clients want heard, Dawkins Group agents are responsible for the exact opposite. By silencing messages that clients (or Horizon) don't want spread further, dealing with bad press becomes a matter of deletion and cover-up rather than backpedaling and insincere apologies.

- This association would explain why Charisma Associates is so stunningly good at damage control.
- Sunshine

The second Dawkins Group mode involves agents infiltrating potentially dangerous, problematic, or competitive organizations and then dismantling them from within via disinformation campaigns and other generally nonviolent means. Although agents mostly target organizations that are a direct threat to Horizon or its goals, the Dawkins Group has on occasion set its sights on groups that pose a danger to the general public, such as terrorist or cult associations.

- Well, we know that's not true. Why else would Humanis still be around?
- Goat Foot

- The Humanis Policlub is just a bunch of bigoted thugs whose hobbies include wearing bed sheets, holding rallies, and beating up on metahumans. Alamos 20K, on the other hand, an actual anti-metahuman terrorist group, is far more the Dawkins Group's speed.
- Beaker

As most Dawkins Group agents are either well-trained charismatics or social adept initiates, they are notoriously difficult to identify and track down. If you do recognize one, you've already been worked over, and by then it's too late. One confirmed Dawkins agent goes by the uninspired moniker "Agent," and I've heard tell of others using a generic "Mr./Ms. Dawkins" handle at times.

ACOS Y
ARISCOS

MITSUHAMA

Culburn ducked back behind the massive corpse of what he could only call a dinosaur. It was unlike anything he had seen in the books he read as a child, but he was no expert and this also wasn't the world of his childhood. He peeked out around the scaly grey rump of his jurassic meatshield, looking for an escape route. The scene before him was like some strange fantasy trid.

In the distance was a sprawling red stone castle atop a hill with a village of thatched-roof structures sprawling out down the hill away from the main gate. Thin trails of greenish smoke rose from chimneys in the village and castle. The distance was too far to see the inhabitants in detail; they were simply shifting dots among the structures.

Up close they were nothing like Culburn or any member of the MCT group, not that they were the most diverse crew. The entire MCT exploration team, corp guys and contractors, were all human, and mostly of Asian descent. The locals were best described as lizard men. Scaly skin, long faces, frilled spikes, thick tails, and clawed hands all on a humanoid frame.

Nearer than the castle was the small mining camp that had been the location for all their group's interactions with the locals. It consisted of two buildings next to a wide hole dotted with black holes that lead into the cavernous mines. The buildings were built from blocks of shiny black stone with the look of obsidian but the strength of granite.

A chunk of that rock was the reason they were here. One of the security officers had gotten a block to do some carving only to bring it back and discover he had a six-kilogram block of orichalcum. MCT was back in days to work out deals to get more.

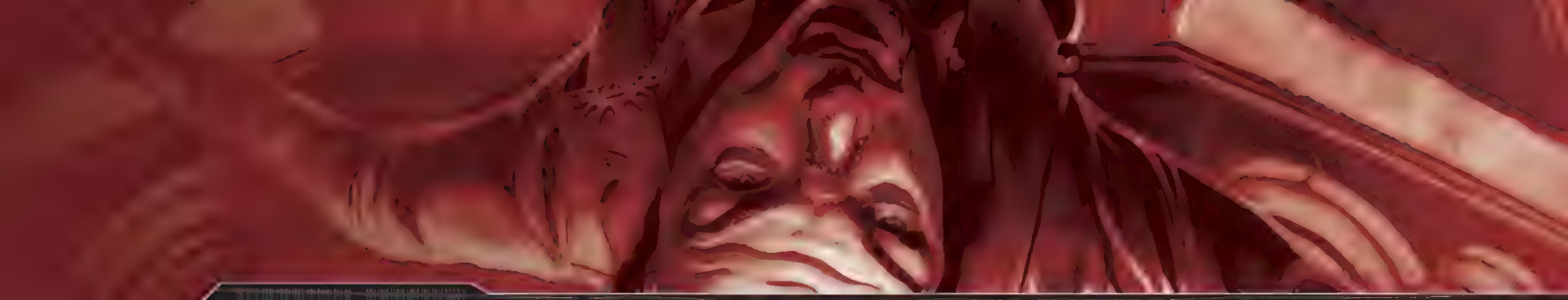
Neither of those distant places mattered to Culburn right now. His main concern was now the dozen lizard men who were embroiled among the MCT forces. Swords and shields clashed on the bloody field. The MCT team had been chosen for their melee skills, but they were still no match for these warriors raised with a blade in their hand. Near the rear of the group, Culburn could see the MCT mages working fervently alongside Falshus, the spirit guide for the team.

Culburn slipped out from the far side of the dino cadaver trying to get around the battling group without being noticed. He reached a point directly opposite the mages when the area around them suddenly flashed. The glare blinded Culburn for a moment, and as his vision cleared he saw the shimmering gateway that had appeared and the other members of the MCT team fleeing through the opening. The local warriors were recovering but held their place, not approaching the arcane opening.

But the ground they stood on was between Culburn and the gateway. He considered running but knew he'd never make it. As the gateway blinked out, Culburn dropped to the ground. He was left behind, trapped here.

It was best to play dead for a bit and maybe get back when MCT returned in force.

When he finally stood, he looked at the castle once more before turning away toward the forested area where he would hide out. He kept the beautiful image of this fantastical setting in his mind. It was a rare opportunity to see a place like this, and when MCT returned this place would never look the same.



MITSUHAMA COMPUTER TECHNOLOGIES

Corporate Court Ranking (2078): #1
Corporate Slogan: "The Future Is Mitsuhama"
Corporate Status: AAA, public corporation
Worlds Headquarters: Kyoto, Japanese Imperial State
President/CEO: Toshiro Mitsuhama
Honorary Board Advisor: Taiga "Tiger" Mitsuhama
Chairman of the Board: Samba Oi
Major Shareholders: Toshiro Mitsuhama (21%), Samba Oi (13%), Shin Yuruyasu (11%), Saigusa Oguramaro (10%), Uehara Akae (10%), Kürgen Bergfalk (6%), Wyatt Thorpe (4%), Hishi Kensaka (4%) Minor Shareholders (21%)
Major Divisions: Mitsuhama Africa, Mitsuhama Asia, MCT Australasia, Mitsuhama Automatronics, Mitsuhama Computers, Mitsuhama Europe, Mitsuhama Financial Group, Mitsuhama Industrial Technologies, Mitsuhama Latin America, Mitsuhama Magical Services, Mitsuhama Media, Mitsuhama Motion, Mitsuhama North America

MAJOR SUBSIDIARIES:

Computers: Aekei Heuristic Technologies, Black Lotus Software, Brainwave Inc., Dolmen Data Systems, Drakensys, Fairlight, Mitsuhama Computers

Robotics: Astin Remote Systems, Drive-Ware Technologies, Elk-Sedge Systems, Mitsuhama Automatronics, VOR Robotics

Magic: Ambrosius Publications, Apep Consortium, HermeTech Associates, Ipissiumus, Mitsuhama Magical Services, Mitsuhama Thaumaturgical Research, Pentacle Distributing Inc., Pentacle Press, Pentagram Publishing

Transportation: Amtrak Incorporated, California Free State Rapid Transit, Front Range Transit International, Mitsubishi Motor Company, Norfolk Southern, SAAB, Sikorsky-Bell, UCASRail

Entertainment: Confederate Broadcasting Company, Highstar Inc., MediaSim, Meechi Games, Mitsuhama Media, Mitsuhama Music, Sakura Studios, Soonan Simsense

Heavy Industry: Automation System Inc., Mitsuhama-Benguet Mining, Mitsuhama Industrial Technologies, Sumitomo Chemicals, Takai Development Corporation, Zen-Marsh Chemicals

Security Services: Mitsuhama Correction Services, Nizhinyl, Parashield, Petrovski Security, Sakura Security, TK Armors

HISTORY

POSTED BY: TAKATA

Many Westerners favor the saying, "The past is the past." They use this phrase to make light of history and focus attention on the present day. Present-day Mitsuhama Computer Technologies is very different from the Mitsuhama that strode onto the international market back in the early years of this century, but it has not lost the memory of how it grew from a struggling construction company to the most powerful corporation in Japan. Now it has used that memory to become the largest megacorporation in the world. For those who do not wish to seek out this glorious history on their own, I shall provide an abridged version.

It all started during the recession around the turn of the century. Taiga "Tiger" Mitsuhama was facing the collapse of his father's construction company, Mitsuhama Construction. As tends to be the case in a recession, theirs was not the only company in trouble. Tiger earned his name well, as he was not going to go down peacefully. Inspired by the American mantra "United We Stand," he began reaching out to other struggling corporations in an effort to join together and create strength through unity and numbers. Had this plan worked, he may have earned the nickname Wolf instead of Tiger, but the pack did not want to form around him. Undeterred and willing to survive at any cost, Tiger took another piece of classic Americana and ran with it. A construction company gaining support from organized crime. Tiger went to the Yakuza, and in exchange for some money laundering and favorable dealings, he gained the support of an organization that had seen only gains in the recession, as the need to have vices filled rose in order to escape reality.

Tiger may have taken tips from America's past, but his loyalty to Japan never wavered. He was not satisfied with only saving his company. He had originally approached other Japanese companies to unite, not just to save his family's company, but to strengthen all of Japan. Now flush with cash, Mitsuhama Construction grew quickly, often through the purchase of the very companies that had refused him as they continued to

struggle. After only a pair of years, they were a major corporate force with three divisions—heavy industry, computer technologies, and robotics.

Tiger's example inspired his son, Toshiro, who joined the corporation and continued his father's expansion and diversification. Toshiro expanded Mitsuhama in much the same way as his father—snagging struggling operations, then infusing them with capital, solid executives, and the best innovations corporate espionage could acquire. Toshiro was savvy, sly, and willing to break the law. While growing as a megacorporate power, Mitsuhama also grew as a first-rate research and development firm thanks to their eye for underdeveloped concepts, top-notch corporate espionage skills, and a complete lack of any confining morals when it came to business.

Being a top R&D spot lined them up perfectly for the Awakening and eventual rush for magical knowledge. Wise moves, legal acumen, and strategic talent acquisitions built the foundation that has made Mitsuhama the magical powerhouse it is today.

No history of Mitsuhama would be complete without touching on the corp's relationship with the Yakuza more deeply. Tiger and Toshiro kept the corporation growing, and that growth and success earned them respect from the Yakuza. It was not only the money that engendered this respect from the oyabuns. Though father and son knew well what the Yakuza were, they treated them as honored business partners rather than shady criminals. Even after the megacorporation had grown large enough to cut ties, they kept their connection to the Yakuza oyabuns who supported them. That's important to know, because not all of the Yakuza supported Mitsuhama. Not all oyabuns were in on this initial deal, and whenever anyone has a greater concentration of power, others seek to take that power for their own. So it went with the Yakuza and schisms were created.

- Schisms that, to this day, still create jobs for us. Never assume working against MCT is going against the Yakuza or the other way around. And don't discount a job against MCT as a trap if you're contracted by the Yakuza.
- Fianchetto

When Mitsuhama quickly became the larger of the two partners, the investment by the Yakuza started to truly pay off. Everywhere that Mitsuhama went, the Yakuza could follow and get a strong foothold. Thanks to the menace and support of their extraterritorial big brother, the crime syndicate expanded their influence and territory around the world. The symbiosis continued as the additional street-level and shadowy resources of the Yakuza gave Mitsuhama more feet on the ground and eyes in the shadows.

Whenever one is even peripherally involved with the politics of dragons, I like to make it known. Tiger's Yakuza allies already had a powerful backer by the time Ryumyo contacted Akira Watada. Ryumyo awoke in 2011, but it wasn't until 2027 that he sunk his claws into the organized crime syndicate. Once he was in, he was in deep. Within the year the dragon had solidified ties to the Watada-rengo and strengthened the portion of the powerful criminal organization that had not supported Tiger. With those ties came connections to Mitsuhama. The iconic battle of tiger and dragon, prominent in Japanese culture, plays out in the shadows of these organizations to this day. This battle would have long ago been decided if it were not for the strength of Mitsuhama's magical division and the honor and traditions of the Yakuza.

- MCT still sits near the top of every magical field. Probably to continue to keep the dragon at bay.
- Lyran

- Ryumyo is a terrorist thug, not a challenge for the largest megacorporation in the world. I wouldn't be surprised if things got a little heated in the near future.
- M'halo

Their history in the shadows of the world has been as dark, often darker, than any of their rival megacorporations with the exception of Aztechnology. In the '50s they filled the shadows of the world with fear as they extended the Zero-Zone policy to all Mitsuhama facilities around the world, making the idea of crossing the corporation's extraterritorial border a death sentence. Thousands of runners lost their lives in first-world sprawls like Seattle and Neo-Tokyo when they doubted the megacorporation's convictions to hold to their policy in such a place. Only the young and foolish still do so. Third-world Mitsuhama facilities became feared places, whispered to contain the dark spirits of the surrounding culture. Mitsuhama Computer Technologies, a nerdy-sounding Japanese megacorporation, was the most feared company in the world.

- MCT's scary reputation is supported by more than the Zero Zone. The demeanor and reputations of their security personnel truly sell it. They're calm and stoic the entire time they are unloading their automatic weapons into you. Compare that to security corps like Wolverine that are thought of as rabid gun-toting nuts. Scary but unprofessional isn't near as effective as a scary and ice cold.
- Stone

With their reputation for deadly security, their extraterritorial status, and a mentality of profit first, Mitsuhama developed extensive black labs and began the early days of their earth-stripping operations that would lead to disasters like they have left behind in the Tsimshian Protectorate and the Congo. Facilities in the major sprawls became known for their safe environs and the awe-inspiring presence of MCT security officers in full body armor walking around on patrol. While one area of the world felt they were the safest people in existence, another was being plundered for all it was worth, including the lives of its citizens.

While Tsimshian and Congo are well-known examples thanks to the Corporate Court and other megacorporations trying to throw off and hide their own indiscriminate money-making efforts, these places are not the only locales that have been affected by the presence of Mitsuhama facilities in search of resources or using production practices with toxic effects. That is also not the case at every Mitsuhama facility. Green technology has to be developed somewhere, and while MCT may be well-known for its heavy industry beginnings, they have expanded into every possible avenue, including green tech. No profit is turned down by MCT, even if the research may be considered immoral by some.

- I'm not sure it's a matter of morals when it comes to capturing people and experimenting on them. I think that just falls on the latter side of right and wrong.
- Netcat

- It's a moral question of one life saving many. If their research finds a cure for being a technomancer, thousands of lives could be saved.
- Clockwork

- Can we experiment on him to work on finding a cure for blind bigotry? Butch, you up for that? I'll fund the research.
- Netcat

The fact that MCT (and every other megacorp) has efforts to understand and make the abilities of technomancers profitable shouldn't be a surprise. The fact that the technomancers have launched into terrorist campaigns primarily against MCT should be. The megacorporation has been dealing with these issues for some time now, and despite the vast amount of data they've gathered on technomancer abilities and the amazing treatments they have developed for AIPS and other neurological dysfunctions, they're still a target.

The recent change to update the worldwide Matrix was primarily the work of Mitsuhama with some collaboration with NeoNET. They sought to create a Matrix safe from the technomancer threat and have been developing more protocols in the ensuing years to locate and counter technomancer abilities and make the new Matrix even safer.

- The creepy way he goes from talking about the dark and light and which is which is off even for someone around here. At least Clockwork sticks to being a bigot. Who is this guy?
- Netcat

- Was that a backhanded compliment for CW? Are you feeling soka Netcat?
- Slamm-0!

- Tanaka is a pledge. I offered him a shot for some help on another matter. We can make the call on him as usual but give him a chance. He has good insight in places we've been lacking.
- Glitch

CORPORATE CULTURE

Mitsuhama has a strong culture of honor and respect for authority, much like the nation they arose within. Corporate rank and position determine honorifics such as -sama and -san within the citizens of the corporation. All citizens of Mitsuhama, whether living in Japan, Seattle, or London, are required to understand the values of Japan and show honor and deference to the Emperor.

Rank and promotion are earned through hard and successful work. Failure is a cause for shame, not just on the individual who failed but on their entire family. Seppuku is an acceptable atonement for failure that clears the dishonor from the family.

- Runs within MCT often require the target's death to look like seppuku. One never truly understands the value of honor and face in Japan until you are hired by a wrinkled and grey old woman to help her great grandson atone for his failures.
- Mihoshi Oni

MODERN MITSUHAMA

The MCT of today is a megacorporation in the truest sense of the word. They have stakes in businesses on every continent and in almost every country. If hidden subsidiaries were revealed, it would probably be every country. They dabble in every research field out there, rule several of them, and create new ones every day. In the shadows they have a bi-polar reputation. On one hand they are the Zero-Zone corporation with zero tolerance for failure, especially in the case of runners they deem worthy to hire. On the other, they treat successful runners like valued corporate employees. They pay well, deal straight, and if you get double-crossed it was your fault somehow. That fault is most often created by a failure to remember that they expect closed mouths and honor among thieves.

- MCT wants runners to be honorable. And keep their mouths closed. They must recruit from a different pool of talent than I know.
- Slamm-0!

- It's more of a puddle of talent around you. MCT is a solid employer and as long as you know how to be a professional they return the favor. Keeping connections to them covers several different facets of shadow contacts. Arcane, corporate, security, underworld, even emergent.
- Clockwork

- At least that's talent. Not sure what puddle is around you. Oh, wait yes I do, it's the blood of all the technomancers you've sold to them.
- Slamm-0!

As with every megacorporation, we can't cover everything that is currently going on so I will hit some high points. In order to avoid anyone reading for too long before realizing we will not be discussing the current work on subterranean krill farming, I'll introduce my primary topics. I have a tendency to digress at times and others are free to comment with wisdom of their own, so leave my reflection at your own risk. I shall cover MCT's newly acquired position, the effects of this on their status in Japan, the current standing of their issues with the technomancer terrorist threat, their studies of the mysterious powers of the technomancers, and the progress of their arcane studies program examining the astral realms.

TOP OF THE HEAP

There are runners on the street who have never known a megacorporate dogpile without Saeder-Krupp on the top. Other spots have shuffled, but all along S-K kept ahead of the pack. To those who thought the corporate dragon would never be deposed: Welcome to the new world. Though the next round of Big Ten rankings won't be made official by the Corporate Court until March of '78, the official post-audit numbers for MCT have come down from orbit and they've passed S-K's '77 numbers by quite a margin. With speculation showing heavy losses thanks to a very non-profitable dragon shadow war, S-K is likely to slip post audit. While most expected NeoNET to take down Saeder-Krupp as top dog in the next few years, the loss of their Boston HQ, speculation on the cost of a new headquarters, and public support waning as Boston stays closed with no new public information has them lined up for possibly dropping out of the top five.

- Out of the top five? Unlikely. NeoNET may be getting a lot of CFD strings tied to them, but they aren't getting hit that bad. I'm not buying this MCT propaganda without numbers. This monad thing is bringing about a lot of revelations, so we'll see who comes out really hurting.
- Icarus

- Icarus, you poor, poor thing. What will you talk about after NeoNET implodes?
- Clockwork

Mitsuhama, on the other hand, has been busy extending a hand to AA- and A- rated corps that got the short end of the audit stick—a hand that grabs them by the throat and pulls them under the MCT umbrella. While buying up smaller corps wouldn't normally build value quickly—and would in fact normally cost the buyer as they divest for the purchase—MCT has been paying face value for these companies, which have already been given their official audit results, and then reaping the benefits as the companies go up in value thanks to their new status under MCT. The prime benefit, of course, is being safe from the rank shuffle that many fear will cripple any corp that isn't a AAA.

The best part is their audit value was taken from July. Since then they have picked up a half-dozen more lesser-rated megacorps and pushed up their value even more.

- No, the best part is they're going to get smacked for some kind of insider trading once the CC is done with the audit. The official rankings and audit info aren't supposed to be released, and every megacorp isn't even going to be audited this year. Expect S-K to try to avoid an audit by the end of the year and point out that they haven't been audited when MCT gets the new number-one ranking.
- Mr. Bonds

Being on the top is not going to be all sake and orchids for the Japanacorp. S-K is going to be making moves against them, especially against some of their smaller subsidiaries. Also, now that MCT has shown it works, other AAAs, including Saeder-Krupp, are going to be playing the same game. The shadows are going to be full of jobs against A and AA megacorps with strings leading back to the big boys.

- Some of the AA- and A-rated corps are catching on too and have started playing the big boys off each other. The ploy is going to bite some of them in the hoop, and even the ones that are successful are going to feel it on the back end. The AAAs didn't get where they are by playing nice. They'll smile with their shark teeth hidden until you sign on the dotted line and then get payback once they own you. Reputation is often the only thing more important than the bottom line to these guys.
- Traveler Jones

Their new position has created other ripples in the pond, especially back home in Japan. Though it has no official bearing, being the largest of the megacorporations on the Corporate Court has always been an extra feather in S-K's cap, especially when dealing with other Eurocorps. Now that MCT can claim that title, the relationship between them and their Japanacorp kin is straining, both at home and abroad.

The cooperation between the Japanacorps outside Japan is one part of MCT's growth and success, but it may be coming to an end now that MCT is on top of the corporate ranks. Rumblings at home have Shiawase, with their ties to the imperial family, trying to make sure that MCT understands their place in Japan. Even though they are the largest megacorporation in the nation and now the world, they are still subjects of the empire. Their efforts appear primarily political, but they have crept into the shadows when a particular lesson must be taught. These lessons are putting a strain on the cooperative relationship between MCT and Shiawase in places around the world that don't understand the culture of bending to the will of the Emperor. While executives understand the culture of Mitsuhama, they still don't like being told what to do and then being put in their place just to make a point, not because they are actually doing anything wrong. To add insult to injury, the Emperor has been praising Renraku for their efforts outside the nation and for their devotion to the empire on the island. If it were Shiawase, they could at least look at it as a form of nepotism, but Renraku has been the red-samurai'd stepchild of the empire since the Seattle SCIRE incident in '59. Now that they are earning praise over a corporation that has become the dominant force in the world, serious stirrings of envy and discord are roiling the Japanese megas.

- These issues have rumors flying of a restructuring within the nation of Japan and the founding of an Imperial court generated from the megacorps with near-equal power to the Emperor. It would be the first step in his replacement altogether. The shadows are already bubbling with work from this and they'll erupt if the cooperative Japanese spirit ends.
- Mihoshi Oni

The new ranking has already gained them the ire of Saeder-Krupp. While it isn't official enough, people with windows that see the roofs of all the buildings around them know and they're making sure every CC initiative or vote that MCT wants to go their way, doesn't. It may seem petty, but it's a tactic that played out well against Saeder-Krupp in the early days of the court and got them to play along with everyone else in a more globally minded plan of world domination. There are certainly differences between the two, especially those arising from the massive culture gap between them, but as the saying goes, "Power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely." MCT will definitely be suffering some social

growing pains with all of the other members of the Corporate Court, and most of those pains will be played out in the shadows.

When considering relationships, we can't leave out the fact that the smallest ships are affected by the largest waves. Or ripples, in this case. MCT's growth has already involved the absorption of dozens of unrated, A, and AA corporations. Being the biggest kid on the block is going to get them even more small fry that want to hide under the MCT umbrella. While this is great when it comes to negotiating and trying to grow the megacorporation's net worth, it is already stretching their resources thin in regards to security and corporate military resources. They are going to have to make a choice as to which is more important to protect: the heart of MCT or its newest appendages.

The new acquisitions are also not indoctrinated into the culture of MCT yet. These places are not going to understand the Zero-Zone policy, and their security officers are going to have a hard time enforcing it. The squeamish are going to quickly find themselves transferred if they are lucky, but more likely they will be cast out of the corp. Expect the shadows to grow with members of the security forces of smaller corps who weren't able to kill indiscriminately.

- What that means is expect more soft pansies to join our ranks and get themselves killed.
- Kane

- More soldiers for the revolution.
- Red Anya

Every megacorp seems to have developed their "we'll be stupid about this" niche. NeoNET and Evo played with nanites, Ares has bugs, Wuxing won't stop fiddling in the manasphere, the Azzies just love blood magic, Renraku had the SCIRE thanks to their love of AIs, S-K gets dragged into dragon politics, and Horizon has their creepy Singularity (yup, nothing on Shiawase ... suspicious, huh?). For Mitsuhama, it's technomancers.

From the earliest days of kidnapping them en masse to the latest events that involve the technomancers coming to them (just in a much more violent manner), MCT has had technomancers on the brain for over a decade. Their efforts have left them as not only one of the world's best resources on all things arcane, but also all things techno-arcane. MCT has some of the best research on Resonance, Dissonance, Emerging, Immersion, and the Resonance Realms around. If you're a technomancer and you want access to a place that can show you everything you need to know about being the best technomancer you can be, go to MCT.

- You cannot be serious <admin deletion>
- Netcat

- I left those four words. They were the mildest of many of the messages I've deleted. I locked this section from commenting just to avoid more comments before people read the next paragraph. Read on and comment later if you still have valid things to say. Sorry, hon, it's my job!
- Slamm-0!

I know flames are prone to erupt over this section, but let me make an analogy to smooth things over a little. MCT is a great place to learn about technomancers, just like Aztlan is a great place to learn about magic. They've done the research and gathered the vast abundance of data, but their methods are questionable. That said, let's move on.

After the last Crash, when technomancers began to first appear, Mitsuhama was quick to start looking into the phenomenon. Under the guise of helping them, MCT took in AIPS sufferers, many of whom we now know were technomancers. Help came in the form of brain scans and dissections. Both often performed while the patient was still alive. The supply of AIPS patients was limited and MCT needed more research subjects, so they went to the shadows to begin retrieving suspected technomancers. Early on, this just looked like extractions and snatch-and-grabs. Once the reality of electrokinetics hit the world, people began to understand what they were doing.

Like many issues, this started a schism in the shadows. Some runners continued the work because nuyen is nuyen—doesn't matter what the job is, cash stays king. Other runners started refusing the work because they weren't big fans of fueling the fearmongering or giving people over to a megacorp for research. A third faction, smaller than the others but important, worked to thwart the efforts of kidnappers or took the jobs and made sure the technomancer targets somehow fell off MCT's radar, usually slipping into the shadows or getting a new identity and a lesson in how to avoid detection again. The three factions still exist to this day, though not necessarily just to oppose MCT.

All of MCT's sins are now coming back full force to haunt them. Groups of technomancers around the world are coming together to make coordinated attacks against Mitsuhama. We're well aware that many technomancers are not the most combat-savvy of folks. In order for these attacks to be successful, the technomancers need additional forces, and they're using shadowrunners and mercenary units to fill this void, especially spellslingers. MCT is a dangerous foe with strong arcane and Matrix-based assets. These, along with the Zero-Zone policy, make Mitsuhama a scary enemy.

- Careful taking jobs from some of these groups. Funds are usually created through illegal transfers, and the groups they're taking the cash from often come looking. And the path leads right to you.
- Glitch

- That's if the funds exist in the first place. Runners are getting screwed left and right by technos dummying funds for their payments.
- Clockwork

- No arguments against the techno-basher?
- Sticks

- Technomancers are still people. People sometimes do crooked drek to make things work. Runners should do their homework and know who they're working for, so it's on them if they get hoopfragged.
- Bull

Even though they're trying to make some direct attacks, no one would expect them to use this as their only tactic. Hundreds of technomancers are hidden within MCT, trying to bring it down from the inside. They aren't abundant—hundreds of technomancers in a megacorporation with millions of citizens isn't much—but they work their way into valuable positions in order to help those on the outside. A few get caught, and some buy into the MCT line that they're helping technomancers, not hurting them, so their numbers are constantly shifting. Many of them move around within the company by transferring themselves frequently and switching up identities. They put themselves where they need to be, when they need to be there, and then move along to somewhere out of the way. Some of these moves are easy, others require extra assistance from others in the shadows. We get pulled into their efforts often without ever knowing it.

- Extracts on these guys are common. MCT's Zero-Zone has claimed a lot of lives while trying to pull them out. Runs are trading several lives for these ones.
- Balladeer

- Some lives are worth more than others. Especially lives with insider info or paydata.
- Chainbreaker

If you presented MCT's track record and efforts with technomancers to average people, they'd probably ask why it is that technomancers don't just hide out in a friendlier place or avoid MCT in some way. Hiding out might have been a good plan if technomancers had been doing that all along. Problem is MCT got their hands on those who couldn't hide early on, and now the research that Mitsuhama is up to is too dangerous to leave unopposed. Their research into the principles of Resonance and Dissonance is not only dangerous to the future of technomancers, but also the world as a whole. This research, which technomancers are truly the best at opposing, is what's keeping technomancers going after MCT.

MCT has facilities all over the world trying to manipulate the forces behind the abilities of technomancers. Their research seeks ways to instill this ability artificially in others, use the energies in conjunction with regular tech, create technologies to limit these abilities, and identify gainful economic strategies from the abilities—just to name a few goals. Research on Resonance isn't the worst issue. We talk about Aztechnology with visceral hatred because of their ties to blood magic, and Mitsuhama deserves just as much hatred for their ties to Dissonance research and use. This dark side of the technomancer coin still presents a large number of mysteries, but one thing is sure: Dissonance is dangerous. This danger is why technomancers continue to risk their lives working against MCT from within and without.

- Technomancers aren't just infiltrating MCT to fight them. Some are getting inside in order to access their research and resources. Members of Ex Pacis are embedded into MCT facilities around the world. They aren't large in number, but they are obviously up to something dangerous.
- Netcat

- MCT is aware of some of this. They've contracted runs against their own scientists. Runners get easy access to the labs in order to take down the target, and then security comes in and takes down everyone. The runners wake up with a new corporate Mr. Johnson ready to offer them a chance to apologize, and the infiltrator wakes up on the other side of the technomancer research.
- Fianchetto

- I hate that game. I'll usually take the deal, since I still have nightmares about Heater's head popping next to me when he gave the quick "frag off." Somebody isn't always an example, but I value my life too much to be that guy. MCT uses it a lot. Anyone who's good or tough enough to get past the Zero-Zone earns a chance to work for them.
- Chainbreaker

MCT is a megacorporation, and they have plenty of resources to spread around to projects, meaning technomancers aren't the only area that has snagged MCT's sense of reason. Though it says it nowhere in their name, Mitsuhama Computer Technologies is an arcane powerhouse. Being near the top means always trying to keep your edge, and in order to keep the edge in any area, boundaries have to be continuously pushed. With magic, these boundaries are not always metaphoric. MCT has begun leaving their common sense at the astral gateway as they explore the metaplanes in search of the answers to arcane mysteries. Well, mysteries and ways to make money.

Mitsuhama has expanded their sphere of exploitation through extensive metaplanar exploration. No one knows how many metaplanes are out there; some magical theories have the number growing every day.

MCT has explorations occurring every day. It's like an ever-growing field that expands right along with them. These trips are dangerous, and while MCT has plenty of expendable employees, most lack the necessary skills to make an operation like this successful. If a megacorp wants skills for success but still needs expendable assets, they turn to the shadows. One of the issues with metaplanar travel is how hard it is to get back, so shadowrunners are getting stranded all over the metaplanes. The corp loses a low-level scientist or two, but nothing difficult to replace.

Two major foci of their efforts are resources, especially those not available here, and artifacts. Resource searches are relatively straightforward and simple. Go, seek resource sources of value, find a way back, and report in. That doesn't mean it's easy; it may be straightforward, but it's still dangerous.

When it comes to artifacts, MCT has a wider array of efforts. The competition to control the artifacts already present here on our native plane is a dangerous game that MCT has played well. They control a large number of artifacts thanks to the efforts of shadowrunners and their own corporate operatives. All the artifacts in the world have not been found and identified, but the number of unknown artifacts is dropping, making initial discoveries less and less frequent. Acquisition and containment are the focus of most current operations on this plane, but MCT has expanded where they're willing to look to find new artifacts with the logical next step, the metaplanes.

Items discovered within other metaplanes often take on different appearances and aspects when they come to ours. Movement between metaplanes is often physically taxing and travelers often wake up in strange places surrounded by unfamiliar surroundings and unable to identify the object they came through with. MCT and other corps have run a lot of black-bag operations to completely clear out some tenement, poor squatter's doss, and even a mansion in order to take everything into storage and locate the object or objects that were brought over.

The metaplanes also possess a wealth of knowledge about artifacts. Either hidden there by their creators or somehow lost or shifted there after creation, artifacts often end up on the metaplanes. The creation story of many arcane artifacts is a mystery that can only be solved from the metaplanes. Answers are rarely straightforward, though clues to these tales are sometimes found strewn about the depths of several metaplanes. Some of the currently known artifacts are thought to have possibly originated on other metaplanes, and their true power can only be discovered with the artifact on its native plane. This means high-security operations with a mix of expendable assets and reliable security staff on the job together. Potential problems are obvious, but money and secrecy are often far more influential than logic or reason.

One specific artifact, or more specifically, a set of them, has been a major focus recently. Current rumors

put MCT in a race with Wuxing to recover components of a powerful tarot deck, thought to have been created on another metaplane and brought here through a spike during the last downcycle of magic. Cards are rumored to exist around the world, with one rumor even putting a card in the icecap within the Arctic circle. No consistent information has come out about this collection or the specific value, benefit, or location of the various cards. The wildest rumors allow a person with the entire deck to weave a person's fate, while individual cards provide valuable divination insights or cause sudden and dramatic shifts in the possessor's life. Mitsuhama will certainly have any cards they currently possess deep in their labs being studied by the best magical technicians in their employ.

- MCT is using a lot of talent from their in-house pool. Experienced staff from Petrovski Security and Parashield, Mitsuhama's security corporations, are being transferred over to special research projects. Most of the projects are tied to MCT Research Unit 13, the company's elite initiatory cabal. They're serious about this.
- Winterhawk

- Wuxing and MCT aren't the only ones after these artifacts. They are both focused on not letting the other get ahead, though. Not sure what that's about.
- Frosty

- Frosty, what's the deal with this, any arcane insight from your people?
- Goat Foot

- The Seelie Court has some organizational structure that happens to mirror tarot arcana, so they are believed to be a good source of information about this rumored tarot. The Court is also a repository of information about artifacts in general, so MCT crews and other artifact seekers are looking for ways to regularly access it. It is skilled at staying hidden from those who are not welcome, however.
- Frosty

FUTURE ENDEAVORS

To look forward for Mitsuhama is to look into unknown territory. They may have gained the crown, but uneasy lies the head that wears it, and large is the bull's-eye on their back. S-K had the threat of the dragon to keep opponents at bay, and while the Yakuza is a frightening organization, they are not the same size stick as a great dragon. Though we don't know exactly what will come of this change in rank, one can guarantee it will mean more work in the shadows.

- Toshiro is already looking at how to secure their place. Several top young executives have been selected to be in charge of coordinating efforts to maintain the top spot. The position is going to need a person with a sharp tactical mind. They'll be responsible for coordinating growth, minimizing the effects of hostile efforts while maximizing the efficiency of counter-maneuvers, and taking on the honor duties of this new rank. Ejen Tieg, Kinetsa Motashi, Killian Kujiyawa, and Grace Mombasi are the top candidates thus far. I have a little bit on them other than their names, and I'll upload a little add-on <here>.
- Mr. Bonds

Keeping that top spot is going to involve even more political and corporate deals than earning it did. Saeder-Krupp won't like being out of the number one spot, and they'll start working the system the same way MCT did. They'll also go after MCT's new acquisitions and work to break any deals before they can happen going forward. MCT will have to pick their targets wisely and a few places already seem to be on the agenda.

In order to bolster their arcanoarchaeology and metaplanar explorations, Mitsuhama has pulled a rather interesting adversary into their fold. The Apep Consortium is an A-rated megacorp based out of Cairo, Egypt. The corporation is best known for their efforts in the study of artifacts and their early efforts after the Washington Rift opened in the late '50s. They've slipped into the MCT fold and joined their Magic Division, but they are likely to cause a lot of internal strife due to their former independence.

- Apep may seem a strange fit for MCT, but when you consider the way they treat places and the effect it has on the mana, you can see why they might benefit from pulling in a corp with rumored toxic magic connections.
- Lyran

Closer to home, Mitsuhama already strengthened their place in Japan and added to their growing new division, MCT Motion. This division may not last as long, as it seems to simply be the temporary home of new corporations that are being picked up with a primary business related to vehicle production and transportation. The biggest purchase has been Mitsubishi Motors Corporation. They were already A-rated, but many of their multinational assets have been targeted by other local vehicle producers in the ongoing Revision Wars. Mitsubishi was hesitant in accepting a place under the Mitsuhama umbrella but has quickly flourished with additional security at their facilities that follow the classic MCT Zero-Zone philosophy. Expect a new line of Mitsuhama-inspired vehicles from Mitsubishi in the coming years.

From: Mr. Bonds
Re: Mitsuhama Prospects

EVEN TEEG

Even is the North American candidate and a bit of a dark horse. Most people aren't even sure why Toshiro selected him, but there has to be a reason. He's young, only thirty-two, and currently works as a marketing analyst at Pentacle. Some speculate connections to Unit 13 due to his strong magical skills, but nothing in his past creates a viable connection. He's the son of a pair of shadowrunners who did well enough to work their way into MCT. He was a bit rough around the edges coming in, but his street skills and abstract way of thinking helped him advance quickly. When his talent was discovered, he was transferred to an arcane training program. He completed it, and then his records thin for a few years as he followed in his parent's footsteps and attempted work as a company man. At twenty-four, he returned for more formal studies and took a position at Pentacle. He is apparently a truly gifted diviner and uses his magical talent to analyze marketing trends. A strange mix, but obviously a successful one.

KINETSA MOTASHI

Motashi is from Japan and works in the MCT headquarters in Kyoto. She is regarded as the favorite for the position by a fair margin but is not considered by most to be the best candidate. Her past as a corporate asset analyst was focused solely on the numbers side of things. Her detractors consider her overly rigid and logical, two factors that, while quite useful when looking at the gain and loss figures for a corporate purchase, may miss important nuances when it comes to keeping the megacorp on top. Motashi may not have the most honed instincts when it comes to corporate analysis, but her cold analytical sense has a very black-and-white—or better stated, black-and-red—orientation toward results, and her ties to the Yakuza have been liberally utilized to keep her projections in the black.

KILLIAN KUJIYAWA

Killian has spent his entire life within MCT Europe watching and learning from the work of Lofywr and S-K Prime that kept Saeder-Krupp on top. He is considered the most qualified based on experience and understanding, but he has only a conceptual knowledge of work in the shadows. His analysis of the efforts of S-K Prime has given him megapulses of data to learn from, but he has yet to experience any of it from a real-life point of view. Some consider this a benefit, as he hasn't been exposed to the emotional side of the shadowworld that often jades or corrupts corporate executives through emotional connections. His weakness in the eyes of other corporate executives is his questionable loyalty. He has been known to speak more highly of Saeder-Krupp and Lofwyr than one would expect from an executive at MCT.

GRACE MOMBASI

Grace earned her position near the top of MCT Africa through ruthless tactics that led to unprecedented growth across several African nations, including the reclusive ghoul nation of Asamando. Her unwavering brutality when it comes to hindering the growth efforts of NeoNET/Transys-Erika on the continent earned her a personal visit from Toshiro and several other board members earlier this year. The visit was intended as a surprise, and Grace was able to demonstrate her considerable intelligence-gathering skills by having every visiting member met by one of her top executives when they first entered Africa. She met Toshiro by changing from her flight-attendant uniform to civilian clothes as his flight crossed over African soil. That move alone has her sitting as the top candidate in Toshiro's view, but several of the other board members felt slighted by not being met by Grace and for her invasion of their privacy. Her selection would definitely lead to more growth for the African continent. She is already rumored to be looking at taking full control of efforts at the Kilimanjaro mass driver, especially with S-K's recent completion of the space elevator.

- Those are the top four, but two other candidates were selected to participate, and they don't appear to be playing the game the same way the others are. Kenner Ashwood was visited by Toshiro at the MCT office in Sydney. Ashwood runs shadow asset operations all over the South Pacific and Australia. He's not considered much of an option by the majority of the other executives in MCT, because he was not born into the company. Ashwood joined MCT as a shadow asset and quickly worked his way up. He's been a runner, company man, corporate fixer, corporate asset coordinator, and now leads the region's shadow assets. He's still doing this same work even after his meeting with Toshiro. He could be wrapping things up that were in the works, working in some beneficial jobs for his efforts at the new position, or choosing not to try for the new position. The last is unlikely, as Toshiro is not the type to simply offer; rather, he is the type to inform you of your next opportunity with the expectation of obedience.

  The other candidate who seems to have been missed is Ilyena Mitsuhama. She's not related to the owning family. Rather she took the name when she joined the corporation back in the '50s. Before that her name was Ilyena Iktusketkiv. She was the daughter of a farmer in Tsimshian while MCT was pillaging the nation. Her father was member of the Humanis Policlub who had moved up to Tsimshian to work for MCT and push the HP agenda from the shelter of the megacorp. Sometime around her eighteenth birthday, Ilyena's father found out his daughter was not entirely human. The story from that point involves rumors of disfiguring abuse to maintain her human look. It's a false cover to keep her true nature—she's an eastern drake—out of the public eye. She was taken in by a mine foreman working in Tsimshian after her father died in an electrical accident, according to the official record. She took the company's name to honor her kind patron, who spoke with reverence of the corporate family that had raised him. Her stay there was short, as she was quickly moved down to Seattle and slipped into corporate anonymity for over a decade before gaining some public spotlight in Los Angeles as the MCT liaison to the PCC. I imagine detractors who know her true nature worry of draconic influence, but she is by far the most outspoken of the candidates about her love for MCT.
- Mihoshi Oni

- The attacks were all Mitsuhama. The other automotive companies are so busy dealing with their own status, none of them are going to strike out at their "rivals" in order to maintain their rank. It just doesn't make sense to put resources toward something like that. Mitsuhama, on the other hand, made out great in this deal. They've got an automotive division now and additional Japanese corporate currency.
- Mihoshi Oni

Mitsubishi also presents a strengthened position in Japan. Their headquarters in Japan is now part of MCT's properties. This gives the corporation a headquarters facility in both Kyoto and Neo-Tokyo. Their Kyoto headquarters is already close to Osaka and the Shiawase headquarters and now they will have a spot in Tokyo across the bay from Chiba and the Renraku headquarters. There's very little surprise as to why the other Japanacorps are trying to keep Mitsuhama's ego in check.

The MCT Motion division also gained another two AA-rated corporations and five unrated corporations. Showing their desire to expand and continue to diversify into fields they were not previously a part of, MCT pulled CAS-based Sikorsky-Bell into the fold. The Texas aerospace corporation adds aerial vehicle production capabilities to MCT Motion. This strange purchase was brokered with a massive offer of resource and technology inflow from MCT's myriad other divisions that will pull Sikorsky-Bell, along with their Sikorsky Aircraft and Grumman Aerospace Corporation subsidiaries, up to the top of the aircraft production field.

Almost side-by-side with their Mitsubishi Motors and Sikorsky-Bell deals, Mitsuhama also added a major European AA-rated megacorporation, Svenska Aeroplan Aktibolag—better known by its modern name, SAAB. The deal is worded in such a way that SAAB maintains some level of autonomy beneath the MCT Motion division, but I'm sure that will quickly be circumvented and SAAB will simply join the Mitsuhama fold. The move not only brings more automotive manufacturers (SAAB, Scania) to MCT but also brings in drone (Saab-Thyssen), missile system (Saab-Saaker), electronics (Drakensys), and arms (Royal Swedish Arms) manufacturers as well.

Much like the deals of Mitsubishi, Sikorsky, and SAAB, the deals for the five unrated corporations were also done simultaneously. While MCT Motion formed and orchestrated those efforts, these were worked independently by five separate offices of the Mitsuhama Financial Group in order to avoid a single office realizing what Mitsuhama was up to in North America. Let me ask, what do Amtrak Incorporated, California Free State Rapid Transit, Front Range Transit International, Norfolk Southern, and UCASRail all have in common? Yup, they are all owned by Mitsuhama. That means they now own every major railroad line and railroad company in the CAS, UCAS, and CFS, as well as sections that run through the PCC, Sioux Nation, and Salish-Shidhe where they are allowed to traverse the rails but not stop. Exactly what they plan to do with this is a matter of intense speculation, as it allows them to put a chokehold on freight moving around the nations by rail.

- What the frag? MCT now has a chokehold on North America. How the frag did that happen?
- Bull

- The right money, in the right places, at the right time, to keep everyone's mouth's shut just long enough for it all to go through.
- Mr. Bonds

- Welcome to the United States of Mitsuhama!
- Slamm-0!

If it wasn't enough that they've managed to snag the top spot in the corporate rankings, wrapped a firm grip on the throat of North America, and built an entire division from scaring other corps under their umbrella, there's more.

Those purchases may have cost the most in nuyen, stock, and favors, but they did not add the most in value. Those high-return purchases were made all over Africa as MCT bombarded corporations of all sizes all over that continent under the guise of another AA-rated megacorporation, Yakashima.

MCT gained the Yakashima name by purchasing Yakashima Africa, along with Sakura Security and TK Armors, from Yakashima. Their fellow AA-rated Japanacorp gained a great favor from a friend along with CodeBlue Biotech, which MCT had been struggling to truly utilize as it lacked a proper home in Mitsuhama. It was a win-win that also allowed MCT to expand in Africa behind the mask of Yakashima, a far less threatening megacorporation. The exact extent of MCT's holdings in Africa are hard to ascertain, as they're hidden behind and constantly shifted between Mitsuhama Africa, Yakashima Africa, Mitsuhama Financial Group, Mitsuhama Industrial Technologies, Mitsuhama Magical Services, and Mitsuhama Media. All told, Mitsuhama may hold majority ownership in as many as fifty-six percent of the corporations in Africa. If the pressure from the Emperor becomes too great and they need a new home, Mitsuhama could become the first AAA megacorporation headquartered in Africa.

- How did the Corporate Court not notice all this?
- Chainbreaker

- Mitsuhama has been a member of the Corporate Court since its inception. They are well aware of every

possible way to avoid CC scrutiny. With the majority of the CC's attention going to the Revision, the new Global SIN Registry, and trying to deal with the CFD and monad situation, MCT had plenty of opportunities to slip things right by them. Scary thing is, they're now a megacorporation of almost a whole new scale.
- Mr. Bonds

- They may be the biggest, but they're bloated with excess execs across the board. Expect some serious purging, and that means corporate backstabbery and work for us. All of these subsidiaries and operations are going to lead to some stuffed runner bank accounts.
- Balladeer

- And a lot of graves. This is still MCT. The Zero-Zone will be in full effect on every one of their new properties.
- Sticks

- Can you guys spread the word that I'm starting an asset-holding LLC for runners who want to make sure the cash in their accounts doesn't go to the corps when they pass? I'll take account numbers and hold them in secure locations and if the runner fails to report in for sixty days I'll empty the account into a JackPoint slush fund. We could become serious Johnsons.
- Slamm-0!

- I'm not sure if you're kidding or not.
- Pistons

- I was, up until I realized what a great idea that is. Plus we can fund some investigations into this Nexus-members-targeting-us drek.
- Slamm-0!

- I might actually support this idea …
- Thorn

- I cleared out all the other support messages. Hit up Slammy directly to get details. I'm going to say it here for the official record: This is a very bad idea. And I told you so.
- Bull

Since MCT is one half of the pair that did most of the major work on the new Matrix initiative, it isn't surprising to see them trying to tighten control down even more. Their current efforts never got much traction during the first round because technomancers, though touted to the public as the bane of the Matrix, were not the focus when trying to develop security protocols. Now that those protocols are in place and irregular activity can be tracked and traced quickly, MCT wants to move onto the next target: technomancers. They've thus far been much harder to track, as their abilities seem almost natural to the Matrix. MCT's research into the abilities of the technomancers are rumored to have led to a way to track them and even identify and separate the signs of individual technomancers. This will mean GOD can not only monitor and come after those who are being reckless within the Matrix, it also means they can keep track of the specific violations of a certain technomancer over time and eventually come find them from the tracks they've left all over the Matrix.

- This is bullshit. If they had this kind of tracking, they'd have every technomancer in the world in their experimental labs. They'd have a much easier time dealing with the organized technomancers coming after them too. This sounds cool, but I don't think it's anywhere near production or even valid experimentation.
- Sir Icelot

- We don't like to simply make discounting statements of other people's work here. If you're going to call bullshit, you need to get some data first, not simply state you don't think it's valid because the big megacorporation is not doing things the way you would if you were a big megacorporation.

  That said, MCT has been developing methods to identify technomancers by their Resonance signatures. The key component of their system is a need for an initial reading of that signature. Allowing technomancers to attack your peripheral subsidiaries to make them feel successful, all while getting readings from the attacks, is a perfectly legitimate tactic for a corp like MCT.
- Netcat

- Well done, kitty. Realized too late, though. Expect the purge to begin soon.
- Clockwork

- Just keep in mind the rules for here, Clockwork. Netcat, Puck, and all the rest of our TMs are off your target list, even if MCT hires you for them. You exist under the same protections they do and have probably been saved far more often by those rules than you realize or would be willing to admit.
- Bull

The same labs are also working on weapons intended to target and attack technomancers specifically by using a broad-spectrum Matrix burst. The attack damages the technomancer's persona but leaves other Matrix personas and icons alone. Early test efforts damaged everything connected to the Matrix within the range, but it can now be used like a standard firearm. MCT's field tests continue, while PR efforts are made to create an appeal for such a target-specific weapon.

- I don't want to see the product hit the street, but I'd really like to see what the corporate PR machine puts out for a persona-shooting pistol.
- Slamm-0!

The next Danielle de la Mar initiative is the improvement of the global SIN registry, and MCT is once again behind her latest project. They are fervent in their view that all technomancers, all Awakened individuals, and any sentient being capable of interaction with the world but lacking a standard physical form be registered with a special SIN. This means AIs, shapeshifters, and free spirits (among others) will need a special SIN. Implementing this plan around the globe will require support from MCT and the other members of the Corporate Court. Now that they're on top, MCT will need to be careful and political with the other megas to avoid any suggestion that this agenda is being forced down their throats, even though the process has been in the works for over a year now.

- With MCT leading the charge on a global SIN registry, expect the Yakuza to become a primary supply line for fake SINs.
- Traveler Jones

- That should create some changes in the underworld landscape, too. I expect some pushback from the other crime syndicates, especially those without strong megacorporate ties.
- Fianchetto

- The trouble is also going to come between the Yaks with affiliations to MCT and those without. Expect the ripples from all this global SIN stuff to reach the street easily. Tough-to-find fake IDs are going to be only a minor problem when you can make all your money helping out one crime family or another completely for cash.
- Sticks

Their growth across Africa has brought the Kilimanjaro mass driver back to the forefront of MCT's needed space projects. The successful completion of the space elevator by S-K, followed by their loss of the top spot to MCT, is going to strain the relationship they had and limit the access MCT will have to the space elevator once it expands to public use. The KMD is their alternate solution to getting things up into orbit without the expenditure of massive amounts of fuel. They need this alternative option if they are going to stay competitive off-planet. Current efforts seem to be successful, as they are increasing the number of launches with each passing week.

As we've seen, one of the largest areas of difficulty with the KMD is the local spirits. A portion of MCT's metaplanar exploration will certainly involve efforts to find items, locations, and beings in order to appease the Kilimanjaro spirits. Exactly where they will need to go is unknown, but runners with metaplanar exploration experience will be in high demand.

- These are definitely the kinds of jobs that will end up employing entire teams of deniable assets. Not because they need to keep themselves distanced from the work, but because deniable also means expendable, and many of these jobs will be crapshoots with poor intel, an unknown and possibly hostile environment, and no backup or access to additional resources.
- Stone

Mitsuhama's big move is going to change plenty, but they will stay the same old hyper-efficient Zero-Zone megacorporation we've all learned to respect. The best part about this will be the increase in business it pushes into all levels and aspects of the shadows. They're going to move significant resources and nuyen into the shadows, and that's the best thing a runner could ask for (with the exception of a free island to live on with all the luxuries of modern life, but doesn't that go without saying?). So get out there and get some of that MCT money. They definitely don't need it all.

- Still want it, though.
- Cosmo

NEONET

Karyn Erickson found herself staring at the ARO in front of her, mesmerized by the morphing shape, and stunned each time it solidified. She watched the full cycle, over and over. The quartet of well-known symbols was easy to interpret, and yet it made her question the very meaning of each shape because of the instantly wrong feeling that arose from the pit of her stomach when the cycle finished each time.

The first symbol, a five-pointed star in three dimensions, reminded her of her childhood. She remembered that blue logo being everywhere. It was a symbol of pride for everyone she knew. She felt nostalgia well up and pull the corners of her mouth up toward the sky.

The second symbol formed from splitting the arms of the star. They thinned and grew outward until they ended in a pair of five-pointed three-dimensional stars, back to back. This symbol made her feel energized and willing to take on the world. It was the symbol of her teenage years. Years where she rebelled against the nostalgia and rigidity of that first symbol, but still loved it just the same.

The third symbol was not a morph as much as a growth and a color change. The ten points stretched as the morphing ARO seemed to pull in mass from around it. The cool blue of the first star changed to a fiery gold that made her squint against the virtual glow. This was a symbol of power, growth, and stability. It was the life she lived now, the world she prowled like a tiger on the hunt, the corporate future of the rebellious teenager who helped to change the world. The formation of this third symbol had fueled her thirst for success during the first cycle. It put a glide in her stride like a cat on the prowl.

The fourth symbol, a left-facing crook with a dot below, formed from as the star collapsed in on itself. It was a symbol she knew well. It ended every query she ever wrote, and here it seemed to act as the ultimate unknown. The question on how this series will progress, or better stated, whether the series would progress. It was the symbol that created the wrongness.

The first time the interrogation point appeared she read the series as, "Where will we go next?" and there was a sense of worry buoyed by the joyous feelings of the first three symbols.

The second time through she didn't get the same nostalgia high, remembered the time she was arrested as a teen, recalled the feeling she had when the quarantine in Boston was announced, and questioned whether there would be a future.

By the third time she had stopped walking. She focused all her attention on the symbols. The five points of Fuchi brought to mind Kaneki, her childhood best friend that she hadn't thought of in decades because when Fuchi split, he moved to Japan. The blue star of Novatech reminded her of Anton, her high school boyfriend who ended up in a coma after the Crash. The golden starburst of NeoNET brought to mind the faces of dozens of friends, lost in Boston, that she blurred out with a dose of bliss every night when they started to creep into her thoughts. The question mark brought to mind the hundreds of questions she had about her future, her unborn daughter's future, her distant fiancé's future, and the future of NeoNET.

By the fourth time she couldn't process all the thoughts.

Before the fifth had completed her glasses were smashed on the ground.

As the sixth completed, though she didn't see it, she started crying.

In the middle of the seventh transition from the Novatech to NeoNET star Karyn was pulling the small tube of white powder from her purse.

Before the eighth was done Karyn didn't care anymore. She walked on and thought of nothing but the sensation of the stockings on her legs and the temperature of the air as it passed her lips.

It was pure bliss.

NEONET CORPORATION

Corporate Court Ranking (2078): #8
Corporate Slogan: "Tomorrow Runs on NeoNET"
Corporate Status: AAA, public corporation
Worlds Headquarters: St. Louis, CAS
CEO: Richard Villiers
Chairman of the Board: Anders Malmstein
Major Shareholders: Richard Villiers (22%), Ander Malmstein (18%), Celedyr (13%), Trans-Latvia Enterprises (11%), Caroline Villiers (11%), Cale Winters (2%), Christopher Winters (2%), Kazuko Yoshiyuki (1%), Chandra Patel (1%), Minor Shareholders (19%)
Major Internal Corporations: Fuchi Industrial Electronics, JRJ International, Manadyne, Mangadyne, Novatech, Transys-Erika

MAJOR SUBSIDIARIES:

Matrix
- Aurora Design
- Belle Mead Comm
- Bristol Optics
- China Cable
- CompuForce
- Cyberspace Development Corp.
- FTL Technologies
- Fuchi Orbital
- Matrix Systems
- PULSE
- Simplex Software
- Wolfware

Financial
- Commonwealth Enterprises
- Pacific Rim Computer Consultants
- Silveril Investments

Augmentation
- Dorada Genetech
- Emerging Futures
- Interscience Inc.
- Mindstrom Neurotechnologies
- NanoGlobe
- Nightengale's
- Pioneer Cybernetics
- Suzhou Biotechnology
- Ultra

Magic
- Living Touch Studios
- LoreNet
- TalisPoint
- T99

Miscellaneous
- Asclepius International (Medical Services)
- Central Industrial (Heavy Industry)
- Everyman (Consumer Goods)
- Minuteman Security (Private Security)
- S&S Agricorp (Agribusiness)
- Visionary Design Works (Architecture/Industrial Design)
- Walker Aerodesign (Aerospace)
- ZenPet (Awakened Animal Sale and Training)

- It's about time we take a look at NeoNET, possibly for one final time. Things aren't going well for the world's second largest megacorporation, including the possible loss of that title. I went to Icarus for this and he delivered an open and honest—at times too honest—account of NeoNET's past, present, and future. We all know about Richard Villiers and his history with Fuchi, and Novatech, and now NeoNET, so no one is writing them off, but even Icarus, a NeoNET insider, is having his doubts. Enjoy the read and feel free to drop more juicy tidbits if you have them.
- Slamm-0!

PAST

POSTED BY: ICARUS

When it comes to NeoNET, I'm the guy everyone looks to for insight. I rarely give it away for free, and I usually try to spin it so that it helps my stock value instead of hurts it. This time I'm going to try and lay it all out there. NeoNET stock has been slowly dropping over the past few months. The end of '77 was the lowest value for NeoNET shares since it first merged, and some of that value is being maintained by the rising share value of several of its holdings. While NeoNET is down, Erika, Fuchi, and JRJ International are all up, providing emergency floatation devices for their parent megacorporation. Some of the reasons for this are obvious, others more muddled, and some are buried deep in closets or locked away behind boardroom doors. I'll give you

what I know and keep it relevant to us. Now, I have to be reminded at times that some of "us" were not globally aware in the early 2060s, or even the early 2070s for that matter, so I'll take a little time to cover the history in broad strokes. If you know the history of NeoNET, skip to **Present**, but for you youngsters, take a minute out of your busy lives and take a look back at the wild history of this resilient megacorp. Many a runner has hoped to be as capable of rebounding as this corp. NeoNET has been like the phoenix, burned to ash and reborn over and over. A nuyen or two in the right place could have you retiring on their next rise to power.

- Wishful thinking there, flyboy.
- Clockwork

JRJ INTERNATIONAL

We can start all the way back in the 2030s with JRJ International. JRJ was a founding member of the Corporate Court and thus gained a permanent seat, what is often referred to as the "Golden Ticket." They are a multinational conglomerate and still a legitimate megacorporation, but even Horizon has more assets. I always start with them, just to show the ball before playing the shell game. Richard Villiers didn't have JRJ yet when he started playing in the megacorporate big leagues, but it's an important part of the rest of the story. From this point forward the important thing to note is that JRJ International belongs to Richard Villiers and assures a seat on the Corporate Court.

- So this so-called corporate shark is really just a flounder with a free pass?
- Chiller

- No. He got control of JRJ and into Fuchi before the Golden Ticket. He's been coming out on top of every deal he's made for almost half a century. JRJ may be an ace up his sleeve, but he's still a top rate poker player without the cheat.
- Mr. Bonds

- What's Fuchi got to do with this? They're small potatoes.
- Chiller

- Read on, young Socrates, read on.
- Mr. Bonds

FUCHI

Next big piece of the historical puzzle is Fuchi Industrial Electronics. While the brand name and chunks of the corporation still exist, they are the scattered remains of a once powerful Japanacorp. Fuchi was the computer industry powerhouse owned by the Yamana and Nakatomi families of Japan in the 2030s. Enter our corporate shark, Villiers, who happens to have control over Matrix Systems and the key technology for the first cyberdecks, which most believe he acquired through less-than-legal means. Villiers offered Fuchi the technology in exchange for a third of the corporation and control of North and South American operations. Initial refusal was followed by a timely murder and a more amenable member of the Nakatomi family, who accepted Villiers offer.

With his influx of capital, Villiers purchases controlling interest of JRJ International and now brings a seat on the Corporate Court and a AAA rating to the company. The Japanacorp, with the Boston-born shark as CEO, was destined for internal strife. While Fuchi's divisive internal pieces may have poured billions into the shadows over the years, it took a few decades and a dead dragon to instigate the final spiral of Fuchi. Dunkelzahn must have had a real problem with Fuchi. It was his bequeathing of stock, in Renraku, to Miles Lanier, Villiers' right hand man, that drove the final wedge between the divisions. When the cracks became visible, so did the fact that Villiers now held the most valuable pieces of Fuchi NA in his personal portfolio. Triple-A Fuchi broke apart, and Fuchi NA gave rise to the next phase of life for NeoNET's most turbulent ancestor.

NOVATECH

The day the Fuchi Towers in Boston were relabeled the Novatech Towers became a corporate holiday, known as Ascension Day. While Novatech was founded on paper on some unknown date in the mid-'50s, this was the date for the official rise to Triple-A status. They were headquartered in Boston, much like NeoNET, owned and operated primarily by Villiers, much like NeoNET, and they got hosed in an event involving AIs, much like NeoNET.

The name of Novatech was appropriate for their nova-like rise to power, flash of apparent implosion, and then their black hole like gravity that pulled other powers to them. Looking for a big win with an initial public offering, or IPO, for the privately owned Novatech, Villiers didn't realize he was setting the stage for the Crash of '64. Though flush with cash from the offering, he was also hammered by the confusion caused post Crash and the spread of damaging rumors that Villiers was in collusion with Winternight. Novatech's reputation stumbled, but their value did not. Still guaranteed a seat on the CC, they faced serious takeover threats due to the coincidence of their IPO and Winternight's attack. With enemies at the gate, Villiers sought some new friends. From Novatech's embattled position, NeoNET rose and Novatech went from being the second largest megacorporation in North America to part of the second largest corporation in the world.

ERIKA

One name was all the branch ever needed. Erika was a AA-rated telecomm and electronics giant based in Fin-

land. The baby of Anders Malmstein, it was, and technically still is, the biggest competitor for S-K's Aetherlink in Europe. As megacorporations go they kept their heads down, focused on dominating their chosen arena while dabbling in other places, and avoided troubles that crippled competitors.

- Or caused the crippling. Erika is a megacorp. They did what megacorps do to survive and thrive.
- Glitch

Erika's primary focus has always been government and industrial data-infrastructure and upgrade. They've left tasks like maintenance to sub-contractors so they can focus on the future, not the past. After being a key player in the development of the WMI (Wireless Matrix Initiative) post Crash 2.0, Erika merged with Transys-Neuronet, combining tech expertise and precision craftsmanship with innovations being developed by Celedyr.

TRANSYS-NEURONET

If you follow cybernetic advancements, you've been following Transys-Neuronet, If you've had an interest in the public affairs of dragons, you've been following Transys-Neuronet. If you like stories of intrigue, insanity, and innovation, you've been following Transys-Neuronet.

Transys has always been a leader in augmentation innovation thanks to the curious brilliance of Celedyr. As a great dragon curious about the advancement of metahumanity through medical, rather than magical, advancement, Celedyr has kept T-N beyond the forefront of the field. Megacorporate extraterritoriality, a draconic sense of morality, an insatiable curiosity, and an unrivaled ruthlessness when it comes to his studies have allowed Celedyr, and T-N, to push the envelope and stretch what is considered acceptable in terms of augmentation, including work on augmenting animals, paranimals, and even dragons.

All of that was even before merging with Erika, and eventually Novatech, to become part of NeoNET.

Under the NeoNET umbrella, T-N has added AIs and technomancers to their areas of study. Celedyr has spoken frankly about his beliefs in AI sapience and the rights they deserve right alongside technomancers and their potential to bridge the gap between man and machine with nothing but the mind. The depths to which one could speak on Celedyr can be found elsewhere so I will extend a final important point on his part in the history of T-N and NeoNET and remind that throughout this history he has been the head of Research and Development. While other dragons play at owning and manipulating corporations, Celedyr has focused his considerable mental faculties on augmentation innovations.

- For those not up for interpreting that statement, just think of it this way. Most of this dragon's brainpower and efforts have gone into augmentation design and innovation. While we've seen plenty of new systems come out of T-N in the past, how far behind their R&D curve is their marketing?
- Bull

- From personal experience, pretty far. I ran into one of Celedyr's Knights of Rage on a job in the Carib. I've seen sammies with top-of-the-line wires, and this guy made them look turtle-like. On top of that, he made a straight jump from the deck of a Kingfisher to the main deck of a cargo freighter.
- Kane

- Magic. The KoR have serious initiates. They have their own internal group and a dragon as their patron.
- Haze

- No mojo. My slinger assensed and got serious cyber.
- Kane

- Cyber-adept. It's been a major research area for Celedyr for a few decades. He's probably made some innovations, and the KoR play guinea pig for him all the time.
- Winterhawk

TRANS-LATVIA ENTERPRISES

I can't give you a full rundown on the history of NeoNET without mentioning the mysterious Trans-Latvia Enterprises. In all the years since they snagged a chunk of Novatech, they have been a giant question mark. Rumors surround them about magical cabals, vampires, templars, and even a society of adult dragons. The key thing to know about them is that they have worked to keep Villiers in check. They don't keep him from being successful, but they certainly keep the collar and leash on.

- While rumors fly I'll add one more: Dunkelzahn. The Big D has been putting the brakes on Villiers for decades. Lanier gets Renraku stock, Dankwalther gets money to fuel his crusade, Reality, Inc. snags Cavalier, Trans-Latvia keeps the leash on, and on and on.
- Plan 9

- Where's the connection?
- Slamm-0!

- Exactly!
- Plan 9

- Guess we know who's in charge right now.
- Slamm-0!

NEONET

Now for the actual history of NeoNET. As a corporation, NeoNET came into existence in the late '60s, when Novatech merged with Transys-Erika. After the crash, Richard Villiers and Anders Malmstein met privately to discuss the merger of their two megacorporations. Celedyr had only recently been craftily outmaneuvered by Malmstein and Hildebrant-Kleinfort-Bernal to lose control of Transys-Erika and suddenly he was again outmaneuvered as Malmstein colluded with Villiers to merge into NeoNET. That pair took the positions of CEO and Chairman of the Board for themselves and left Celedyr with R&D Director. The new megacorporation was quickly assessed as number two in the world and Villiers was right back near the top.

- While people have claimed Celedyr was "outmaneuvered" several times, he hasn't lost any assets, has gained personal value, and now is in charge of the world's largest R&D department. NeoNET tops every other corporation in R&D budget, even S-K. Celedyr has access to more resources, more personal wealth, and more freedom to work than he did a decade ago. Not sure that's getting duped.
- Sticks

- "Let the puny humans think what they may. Reality is reality. Words do not change that." —Celedyr
- Frosty

For over a decade NeoNET continued to grow and innovate. They played the megacorporate game like everyone else: hiring runners, bickering internally, and trying to keep the value of their stock moving upwards. Since their creation, they have played a part in many major world events. Right now, though, I'll limit my history to just two instances where they've made their mark, because those two are still making a significant impact today.

As the innovators of the WMI protocols, they were the first to be approached by Danielle de la Mar to create the Matrix we now all know and hate. While at the forefront of this "innovation," they were also battling internally about cognitive fragmentation disorder and the possible source being a NeoNET operation that was not signed off on by Villiers or Malmstein. The new Matrix has been a huge corporate success as they've slapped the shackles back on information. The new Matrix is now leading toward a world SIN registry and the push to put shadowrunners of the world back onto the SINless list, rather than the multi-SIN list.

This new level of control also helped to keep any evidence of NeoNET's connection to CFD from leaking.

We in the shadows now know that the original source of CFD came out of Celedyr's Albuquerque compound and infected two of ours, Riser and Fastjack. While Fastjack is still eluding any attempts to confirm his life status or whereabouts, Riser has recently been confirmed dead. His efforts to atone for his crimes fell on deaf ears, and his violations against the Smokers' Club were not forgiven. Back to the point, though. Even with the events of Boston, which seem to be the fault of Celedyr, NeoNET has avoided blame by completely blocking off the city with the help of the Corporate Court. The problem is, at some point, someone needs to be blamed, and all the suspects are pushing the dirt toward NeoNET. The pile is getting bigger, which brings us to current events.

PRESENT

Because I like to point out I completed my high school education, I'll actually introduce this next section. The current events of NeoNET revolve around their new HQ plan, the shrinking Villiers family, issues being caused by head cases (including a rather powerful former part of NeoNET), and the actions of the major players to design the future the way they want it. While I'll cover this narrow window, remember youngsters: NeoNET is worldwide and many-faceted (check the stats line), so you could run into them any and everywhere around the world. You could dig around and think you are uncovering some world-shattering plot, and it's really just another piece of the shell game that every megacorp can play with unmatched skill. What I'm saying is, the megas really are large organizations working hard to dominate the world—it's not a secret conspiracy, it's business as normal.

ST. LOUIS WINS INTERNAL VOTE FOR NEW NEONET HQ

And despite the worldwide coverage of that headline and the remarkably quick start to digging the foundation, this St. Louis project is likely to end up as nothing more than a big freaking hole in the ground. NeoNET is having loads of trouble in the present, and construction of this megacorporate monolith is a four-year project intended to bring billions of nuyen to the St. Louis economy. An arch that spans the Mississippi is the design, but this is no Gateway. This is a marvel of modern engineering that will have crane elevators bringing in supplies right off the river, a pair of built in bridges, and entrances in two separate nations. NeoNET is truly poising itself to try to reunite the United States.

See the problems?

Even if they weren't dealing with the metric fuckton of issues in Boston, the saber-rattling from the Corporate Court, and the dragon drama going on between Celedyr and Lofwyr following the war they really want to pretend never happened, they set the plans for the new corporate HQ smack dab in the middle of some national politics that have been heated not just since the 2030s when they split, but from way back in the 1860s when they first came to blows, and even back to the 1700s when they first united against a common enemy but really had little in common themselves.

Politicians on both sides of the border are working every angle they can wring a nuyen out of before this whole dog-and-pony show collapses into the muddy Mississippi. Right now some of the most entertaining contractual issues are coming up between the two different architectural and construction firms that are working on the two sides of the river. In order to appease both sides, NeoNET voluntarily eased off on their whole "extraterritorial" status, and instead of just buying both sides and giving all nations the big central digit, they negotiated deals on both sides. The deals still took a lot of shadow ops to lean on the right people and get the right leverage, and now that leverage is split by 570 meters of water that both nations are free to use but don't have a right to sell or negotiate over. This has become a popular target for other corps looking to slow, limit, hinder, or just plain undermine NeoNET. Supplies, workers, and leadership are split between the nations, and the two teams are trying to outbuild each other every day. Being done first could be a big step up the corporate ladder for the executive in charge of construction, or a one-way ticket to megacorporate purgatory for the loser. I'm sure some portion of the construction budget is going toward slowing their rivals with everything from site sabotage to a little extra laxative in the crew's soykaf supply.

The citizens of NeoNET were not unanimous in their vote. In fact, St. Louis gathered forty-seven percent of citizen votes in the first wave of voting, but only moved to fifty-five percent for the final vote since most of the votes that were scattered for cities around the world united behind Cardiff, Wales, while a strong North Am push pulled a ton of sympathy over for Boston. While many naysayers claim the voting results were rigged, I will point out that NeoNET is still one of the progenitors of our modern ultra-secure Matrix set-up. Voting hosts were even directly monitored by members of GOD during the twelve hours of voting.

- GOD or no, there were incidents. Vote day had plenty of shadow work to go around. Whether related to the vote, or using the hype as a distraction, several Johnsons and fixers were running back-to-back-to-back meetings sending out runners in the major sprawls.
- Traveler Jones

- I didn't even work some of the early vote gigs, but I managed to pick up some really nice ordnance for the rest of the day when coverage was gone.
- Stone

The problem now is that St. Louis is a split city that appears to have taken in a split corporation, looking to do some kind of merging right alongside the nation with about the same likelihood of success. We're going to get a lot of gigs in the near future, but a word to the wise. At some point, NeoNET has a chance of imploding. Much like the supermassive stars in space, it's going to create a black hole that will suck in any and everyone who is still within their sphere of influence.

- St. Louis is an up-and-coming city in terms of runner talent. While most locals aren't Seattle- or Berlin-grade, they will be soon as the cities streets heat up. If you're looking to train some new talent and build a stable for your future as a fixer, St. Louis is the place to be.
- Bull

DYING FAMILY TREE

In 2070 there were five influential members of the Villiers family; Richard, Samantha, Martin, Caroline (Cara), and Darren (though Darren's level of influence is questionable). In 2078, one is dead, one is missing, one is detached, and the last two are still headlining the corporate scene, but not how they were at the start of the decade. All of these changes are a result of playing in the corporate shadows, and I have little issue admitting that the ones that remain are the most morally corrupt of the bunch. Though "corrupt" may not be the right word. To corrupt morals, one must have them in the first place.

Richard is still around and working out a few dozen survival schemes all at once. He's a survivor and has no remorse in him. He has made all the proper placations and statements about the loss of Samantha but has done so in the same stoic corporate facade he uses everywhere. While no one expected him to turn all mushy and gooey at the loss of his ex-wife, he hasn't even shown much emotion when interacting with his daughter about the loss of her mother.

Samantha's death was a surprise. Even more of a surprise is the fact that the screamsheets seem to have gotten it right. I won't waste space here for conspiracy theories or rehash the details—hit the news for that—but I know there was plenty in the works when she passed that is now up in the air for others to scramble after. NeoNET Seattle is reeling from her loss, and the chaos is helping out the shadows as execs fight over the carcass of her career.

Martin is still behind the Boston blackout. No one knows what's become of him, but control of his stock has shifted to his niece Caroline. That right there could say a lot about Martin's relationship with his brother, but the deal was probably arranged between the two in order to appease other people with offices on the top floors. Control of Martin's other portfolio assets also belong to Caroline, though much of it is lost in the limbo of Boston. Martin is probably running that empire from behind the walls.

Caroline has now gathered control of eleven percent of voting stock for NeoNET. Her uncle's disappearance behind the wall and her mother's death have put a lot of power in her hands. Her percentage is enough to swing things in favor of one shareholder or another, and that leaves her with a lot of power to leverage around the board. Though always referred to as Richard's daughter, and many remember the precocious teen of the late '40s, it's good to remember she's a forty-four-year-old woman who had time in the shadows as well as in the Villiers home. She grew up watching deals get made, developed a literal killer instinct in the shadows, and now uses all of that with a skill to match any member of her family.

Darren Villiers has always been the black sheep. There are times that I wonder if he just realizes that thanks to his dwarven genes, he's going to outlive them all and thus can sit back, avoid ticking anyone off too badly, and just inherit the fortunes of the Villiers family. I was concerned at one point that maybe he would have to remove Caroline from the equation, but I think he knows that she's just going to build the fortunes and leave them to him.

- Ever wonder why they didn't just pool their resources and form Villiers, Inc.? They'd rank somewhere in the middle of the triple-As in net worth, and they'd have a seat on the CC thanks to JRJ.
- Netcat

- Mostly because they don't get along that well and their familial competitiveness is what's made them all work so hard.
- Winterhawk

- Maybe that's the next AAA.
- Plan 9

Not quite family, but close enough for a long time, Miles Lanier has played a plenty large enough role in the history of the corp to deserve a mention here. Plus he has enough irons in the fire for forging swords to cut down NeoNET, he needs a mention. Now I'll stop myself and presume he's going to comment, since no one wants/is able to remove his access to JackPoint!

- Thank you Icarus. I'd prefer to spread some truth rather than your random speculations on what I'm up to in regards to NeoNET. Though it is more the actions of the other mind within my head that focus intently on NeoNET as it seeks revenge. I maintain mental control the majority of the time. That said, the personality that has taken up residence within my head understands its limited access to the outside world and has adjusted accordingly. It plots

and schemes in devious chunks and sets ways to put assets on their paths and then picks up the data on the back end.

I operate partially to thwart or minimize the damage of my counterpart's efforts, spending large amounts of my time and resources endeavoring to discover its methods. I engage others in this often and have developed complex identification systems in order for them to know who they're engaging. The other has abused my extensive networks of contacts in the past, and avoiding a repetition of that is a high priority. The other's efforts, when briefly in control, continue to focus on NeoNET and the potential collapse of the megacorp has bolstered its efforts and, sadly, its ability to steal time from me.

As for my personal agenda, I have already shared that with all the members of JackPoint that I deem of value in my efforts. Offense is not intended. Simply caution.

I will share that I still seek and promote the discovery of a cure. My efforts that are currently underway will continue and I shall endeavor to seek more opportunities in the future. The arrival, or rather announcement, of the Monads has offered a great opportunity for insight by those who have accepted their state or, quite often, realized the issues connected with this escape route and now seek virtual freedom once more.

As for my view on NeoNET: They are struggling to say the least. Their efforts were quite successful early on, and they were able to maintain a lid on the problems CFD had caused even though the problem has been quite global. The advantage of that is that no one point is a place to focus and no one is able to get a first-hand view of what is going on. A building collapse or nanotech failure here and there is easily swept away by tridstar gossip. The catastrophe in Boston is the catalyst of their undoing. Had it been anywhere but the city where their headquarters was located, they could have easily stepped away. But that was not the case.

I have had no other place to put this, so it will go here and I will simply hope that he finds my sentiment here someday.

Celedyr, I am sorry for your loss. Eliohann was in his day a bright star in the gloomy murk of draconic society. I truly hope that the end result of your efforts is as you intended. You had the best of intentions. I have already felt the loss of Cerberus in my efforts but hope that the mind and body can once again unite and glow like a supernova. That said I also apologize for any part I may need to take in assuring that an abomination of the worst sort does not find its way out of the Boston quarantine. You and I both know there are worse things within those walls than the hordes of raging head cases. If you get this message and desire to contact me, the Soulkeeper knows how to find me. Sincerely, Miles

- Miles Lanier
- Well. Okay then. I won't invite you to my parties either.
- Kane

- Don't know why it wasn't mentioned, but the rift between Manadyne and NeoNET is growing. The magicorp is in serious discussions with several other AAs to get out of NeoNET. DocWagon is among their suitors, and Asclepius would be a great addition for DW.
- Lyran

FUTURE

I'll start by admitting I might be starting this work up after a few too many rounds at the Zero G. The point is, one must be a few sheets to the wind to report out on the future of NeoNET with any honesty. From the inside we can see that she is collapsing, but no triple-A megacorp worth its seat would let that image show until the axe falls and the whole drekshow hits the world stage. That said, we on the inside are still looking at the future, and those of us who have drunk our low-G mass in cheap synthahol are willing to prognosticate on the NeoNET of tomorrow. I'm gonna try to babble as much as I can tonight while I'm still sauced and honest, but in case I crash and sober up, what my saucy self wants to cover is as follows: 1) Celedyr and the strange rumors about Transys-Erika and Ares (yeah, *crazy*); 2) Malmstein and a huge future in Africa; 3) Trans-Latvia (slimy snakes);.4) Richard Villiers and Johnny Spinrad) 5) NeoNET's plans to go down swinging. All right, five points down. I'll line up an outline and see where I get. I'm also going to lock this section with a crazy password I have no chance of remembering and prevent any editing to keep this drunkenly honest. The sysops might be ticked that I can't make it pretty, but honesty is sometimes brutal and ugly.

CELEDYR: WHERE DOES A GREAT DRAGON LAND?

Wherever the hell he wants! Okay. Not really true, but Celedyr seems to be exploring several platforms on which to drop in. First is home. He's been happily spending lots of time at his lair in Caerleon since drek went down in Boston. There is always the possibility of an independent Transys-Neuronet. Whether they would survive the Revision with any significant status is a whole other ball game, but I'm sure a dragon could figure that out. Next up, meetings with Arthur Vogel have created speculation on moving to Ares. Issues within the North American power make the thought of joining that madhouse a little strange, but dragons see many things we mere mortals do not. Third thought, Richard Villiers has made several impromptu trips to Wales, and we all know there is very little in Wales except for sheep and Celedyr. And Villiers isn't a fan of sheep. This pair could be working something out. I'm

not too keen on the idea of Villiers falling for whatever Celedyr is offering, but Richard has made some interesting moves lately.

If Celedyr returns to Caerleon, and Transys-Neuronet goes the route of independence and breaks out of Transys-Erika, it puts him dangerously close to Saeder-Krupp. Not that the two corporations aren't already competing, but the focus will be more exact with T-N rather than NeoNET, if NeoNET goes the way of the dodo. If Transys-Erika sticks together, Celedyr and Malmstein will be up to their ears in S-K Prime operatives looking to make sure their return to the old world isn't pleasant. Now don't get me wrong, these are megacorporations all on their own and they never left their European roots behind, but being part of NeoNET was like an umbrella. They still got wet, but they had a major buffer from the rain. Being back in Caerleon has already ramped up the shadow activity in the UK as everyone tries to see what's next and works to get operatives into his growing infrastructure.

Mentioning the growth of Caerleon allows me to roll smoothly into talk about how ridiculous these rumors about Celedyr joining Ares are. Just because my boy C is messaging with Vogel does not mean the pair are developing some plot to bring T-N, and maybe T-E, into the Ares fold. In fact, Celedyr should be looking for a home closer to Detroit if he was moving to Ares, instead of restructuring his Welsh properties.

So, if it's not about moving over, why are these two corporate icons meeting? Magic! Not that it's magic they are talking; it's magic they are talking about. Specifically, techniques to use magic for cleaning the environment. Vogel has always had a green agenda but one area Ares has never been king of the hill on is arcana. They're still a megacorp, they have arcane assets, but they don't have a great dragon's level of magic and they certainly don't have a dragon who is a huge fan of merging tech and magic. From my viewpoint, Vogel doesn't have the resources to snag T-E or T-N directly, and in order for Ares Macro to back the plan he'd have to get it past Knight and Gavilan's proxy.

Celedyr talking to Villiers is something you would have to expect from two major shareholders in one of the world's major megacorporations. The Matrix could easily facilitate that. The piece that makes me think something bigger is going on is the personal trips Villiers is making to Wales. I'm sure the pair could be worried about eavesdropping, but they share ownership in the largest Matrix tech firm in the world. They could set up a secure connection. These two want a face-to-face because they're discussing something big, and each wants to send a message to the other. Celedyr is leveraging a lower rank in the corporation by making sure the meeting is on his soil. Villiers is making sure that Celedyr knows he isn't scared just because he's dealing with a dragon. It's a battle of wills between two very willful individuals.

- Villiers isn't the only one visiting Wales to see Celedyr. He's had top execs from most of the Big Ten and at least a dozen double A's stop by for one reason or another. Remember that beyond just the possible collapse of NeoNET, there's also a Revision, the new SIN initiative, and the massive coverup in Boston is still going strong. Megacorporate executives have plenty of things to talk about.
- Mr. Bonds

- This is all just a cover for Celedyr's move to Spinrad with the golden ticket from JRJ that he's getting from Villiers for the ritual killing of Samantha and making sure Martin was in Boston for the lockdown. It's been a convoluted mess to get Villiers enough control over NeoNET to push Celedyr's agenda without it seeming like the dragon is making the moves.
- Plan 9

- Ah, yes. Great conspiracy theories of old. Thanks, 9.
- Slamm-0!

I think the most important thing to consider with Celedyr is that he doesn't want to run a corp. He wants to run a research division. Celedyr has kept out of the corporate offices ever since Transys joined with Erika. He has votes and shares and leverages those things for leeway in the labs, but he doesn't want to play the corporate game. Celedyr has already shown how disinterested he is by heading back over to Caerleon instead of looking for space around St. Louis. No one can guarantee they know where Celedyr will go or even if he will actually leave, but plenty of work is going to come from his real moves and the speculations of others.

- Speaking of speculations—the move to St. Louis was definitely not in Celedyr's best interest. Ghostwalker already exerted back room leverage to get Hestaby out of his backyard and was settled on Celedyr operating way out on the east coast. Now that NeoNET is coming to the midwest, Celedyr would be closer to Ghostwalker than Hestaby was and quite possibly stepping on his talons.
- Frosty

MALMSTEIN: ANDERS AIN'T NOBODIE'S FOOL

Anders Malmstein is the least known of the major NeoNET figures. He's still the CEO of the world's second largest megacorp, so it's not like he's some unknown. He's just not a Villiers or a dragon, and thus he plays third chair in the NeoNET orchestra. That doesn't mean he isn't powerful, or smart, or rich—it just means he isn't a showboat. If NeoNET falls, Malmstein is going to be the surprise victor because no one is paying attention

to what he's doing. They're too distracted by the Dick and Dragon show.

- That's not exactly true—no megacorporate executive is ignored completely. But using the fact that everyone is looking a different direction to your advantage is not a bad idea.
- Sunshine

So what is old Anders up to while the other faces of NeoNET hog all the trid time? A lot. Two of the biggest things going on with Malmstein involve the future of Transys-Erika, especially in less-developed areas of the world, and a possible megacorporate deal to move the T-E assets to a different Big Ten mega if NeoNET collapses. All of these hinge on so many things happening that it's crazy to even consider, but the Sixth World is full of crazier things.

- And runners spend a lot of time greasing or blowing those hinges!
- Kane

Transys-Erika has given a lot of attention, and funding, to Africa in recent years. The megacorp has been investing and developing the infrastructure under the guise of product testing and marketing research. Erika commlinks are the most popular 'links is Africa. This increase in commlink count, along with the new Matrix, has pulled a lot of African tribes toward the modern world. The changes will take a few generations, but the long-term goal could be for Erika alone, or perhaps Transys-Erika, to become the first mega-Africorp.

While Malmstein might be looking to grow Erika, it's not entirely clear that he intends it to be independent, part of NeoNET, or part of some other corp in the future. If Malmstein wants to simply be head of a massive corp, he could do fine taking the independent route. If he wants the glamor of being part of a AAA, with everything it entails, he'll need to find a partner. And as is the case with so many parts of NeoNET right now, the dance partner that gets mentioned most often is Spinrad..

The rumor mill says Anders may jump ship early, finding a good place to land without waiting for a Corporate

Court decision on NeoNET's involvement with the quarantine of Boston. Fingers are pointing at Novatech rather than Transys-Erika, and Malmstein is looking to keep the value of his piece of the pie up, by whatever means necessary.

TRANS-LATVIA ENTERPRISES

These dirty dark-room dealing ghosts are like a tumor in NeoNET that won't go away. It's the bad penny, the one you make one deal with to get clear of trouble and then it keeps coming back. I've never liked Trans-Latvia, even before rumors of their connection to Ordo Maximus and secret vampiric cabals. They're leeches—no, tapeworms—living inside NeoNET and feeding off the hard work of its citizens. I usually bite my tongue and avoid giving them any airtime, but today I'm going to let a little bottled rage out.

- I like drunk Icarus!
- Slamm-0!

Trans-Latvia sounds sinister and vampiric, but their connection to Ordo Maximus is with the high-society frat-boy club. The connection got mixed up because the guys who are connected to T-L and OM are also members of the European Mafia. It's no wonder that Villiers wasn't able to buy back the shares he sold off to T-L, because that's how the mob works. They get a hook in and then don't let go.

While that may reveal a little more than anyone knew before about Trans-Latvia, it helps as the foundation for the dirt on Swaraj Verghese, a.k.a. Sascha Vojchetevsky, a.k.a. the Hammer. The current vote proxy for the Trans-Latvia percentage of NeoNET is a former mob enforcer who earned his violent nickname as a child and then proved how smart he was to move up the ranks. Trans-Latvia is going to be pulling a lot of work into the shadows to try to keep their share valuable. They won't want to see a dissolved NeoNET, independent Novatech, or even a Corporate Court decision against the mega. Mobs are good at getting judges in their pockets, and T-L is going to be trying to get some CC judges firmly in hand before anything drastic occurs.

- And the pool pays off to ... Icarus. Wait a minute. This info needs corroboration before we pay out. Not that I'm doubting the honesty of Icarus in his drunken state, but we can't pay off bets on speculation. Hard data or no payoff!
- Chainmaker

- Vojchetevsky is a known member of Ordo Maximus. When he disappeared years back, folks presumed he was Infected or killed for finding out the truth. Interesting to think this might be true since rumors had The Hammer connected to Martin de Vries.
- Hannibelle

VILLIERS AND SPINRAD

A.K.A. RICH DUDES FRAGGING WITH OUR LIVES

Sobered up now. I can't imagine what would have come of this topic had I reached it while I was still intoxicated. Luckily (or not in the opinion of some), I'm sober and can talk on this and the next topic with clarity instead of sputtering off every rumor and utterance I've caught wind of. And even with my lofty locale, the breeze blowing tales of this corporate collaboration are strong. I can't imagine what's getting uttered dirtside. Well, actually I could, and that's why it's better that I'm clear-headed.

I've met both Johnny Spinrad and Richard Villiers. Both men exude a confidence and charisma that make you instantly want to be on their team. Putting both in the same space at the same time could be a world-shifting event or a catastrophe of epic proportions depending on whether their sights are aimed in the same or different directions. When I met Johnny, he was visiting the station on a fact-finding and baby-kissing mission to figure out if this was the place he was going to step out of an airlock and free-fall back to Earth. By the time he left (not via the airlock), he had everyone on board wanting to cheer him on and jump out right by his side.

Villiers has been up here on a number of occasions. Meetings, social events, and even a brief vacation have gotten him off the dirt. He comes up when there's something important to discuss that he greatly desires go his way. There is always a chance someone will say no to him—look at the women in his life—but when he shows up in person, the chances of a no drop to near nil.

You could probably imagine what comes from these two men in the same place revolving around the same topic. When others are present, it's a battle of charisma as they sway the people to their sides and the room becomes divided. When it's just them, it's a miasma of charisma thick enough to choke a dinosaur. But if you get the two of them together, going in the same direction, everyone had better watch out. While they were probably head to head working out a deal, they won't be if some kind of merger occurs. What that means is all of their opponents are going to need extra trash to fling, and shadowrunners around the world are going to be working as garbagemen focused on this pair. Anything that hasn't been discovered is going to work its way to the light, and some of it is going to be made up. The other side is going to be dipping into the Spinrad/Villiers coffers to discredit, disavow, and destroy every bit of dirty cream coming to the top.

The play here isn't just some simple merger. SpIn and NeoNET are not going to become SpInNET, because Villiers hasn't been including any of the other partners in his dealings with Johnny. This is all about Villiers' Golden Ticket getting SpIn into the big leagues, because everyone can smell another Villiers corporate

collapse coming. At best we'll be looking at a weakened NeoNET as one of their megacorporate assets takes the blame and the brunt of the blowback. Money's on the remains of Novatech or Fuchi and a big hit to Villiers, but those two are small potatoes compared to the damage done to Boston and everything else that will suddenly get linked to CFD if that connection goes public. And one of the biggest clues as to Villiers' plan is the fact that he's sold off and devalued tons of Fuchi and Novatech stock. NeoNET's worth took a small hit, but Villiers timely exit still had his net worth come out higher than it went in.

Spinrad on the other side has been liquidating some assets with no sign of reinvestment. Either he's planning to make a big purchase that he wants off the books for a little while, or he's developing his hermit cash hoard and waiting for the end of days. Johnny is not the squirrel-away-your-money type of guy and he'd welcome the daily rush of living through and after an apocalypse. Those who don't think he's sunk low enough to go through Villiers for the Golden Ticket and seat on the Corporate Court are hypothesizing that the money is for buying up enough smaller corps to push the AA over the value of enough triple-As to get them a solid argument about who should and shouldn't have a CC seat.

- Nothing is ever simple and straightforward when it comes to the megas. They're always playing angles like a prism. I wouldn't be surprised if Johnny went for both the Golden Ticket and a nice size boost. No sense only playing one game when some of them could play out together with double benefit.
- Snopes

- And Johnny has proven to be an even bigger risk-taker than Damian Knight.
- Sticks

GOING DOWN KICKING AND SCREAMING

NeoNET isn't going down, but if they do, they are not going gently into that dark night. They are the second-largest megacorporation in the world, and they have dirt aplenty on all of their fellow AAAs. Along with that, all of the top executives are going to want to cash in on the dirty paydata they have while they can still use the leverage and security of NeoNET's seat at the big table in the sky. I get a lot of time up here to keep an eye on what the executives around the corporation are doing and who they're doing it with. These efforts at the top are going to have varying effects on some of the other megacorps if our beloved NeoNET dissolves, and I've already got a decent idea of which way each is trending. Here's a quick look at some prospective actions and how they'll affect each corp. Four of these actually surprised me, because I wouldn't expect to see efforts from NeoNET going towards certain parties among the AAAs. It's one of the few signs that have me worried.

First up is a quick look at the usual suspects: Saeder-Krupp and Evo. NeoNET is working hard to make this pair suffer. This isn't much different than normal. The top dog and the up-and-comer are always going at each other. For NeoNET to make moves against S-K is expected; it's the volume that's straining the shadows' ability to keep up. Work is stable throughout S-K strongholds like Germany and the Middle East, but businesses or operations linked back to the German megacorp all over the world, especially those on the periphery or in places with deep shadows, like Seattle, are getting hit at an alarming rate. NeoNET is working away the edges to try and keep Saeder-Krupp from pulling further ahead as they slip.

Evo, the *real* evil behind CFD, is the other megacorp in NeoNET's sights. While the shadows seem to be whispering NeoNET's name when it comes to blame because of Boston, we all know that was Celedyr's pet project gone awry. Now that Evo is "taking in" all these monads, it should be obvious to everyone that they were running this thing from the beginning, and now they're pinning everything on NeoNET because of Celedyr's experimental error. Good thing is, NeoNET isn't taking it lying down. Runners are taking contracts to hit Roskosmos facilities around the world—there's a heavy focus on fuel and production facilities for those teams that aren't skilled at being quiet, and launch and data facilities for those teams that know bullets and bombs are not the answer.

NeoNET records also show them increasing their efforts to gather monads. They've been doing a lot of snatch and grabs rather than hits, but from what I've read I'm still unsure if they're making power plays or just info snatching. While they tend to file what they have on the activities of the head case, they don't put a lot of AI pattern analysis in the files I'm sifting through. Runners out there might want to actually start looking at what AI or AI fragments have taken control to see who NeoNET is trying to gather. They contract a lot of work against Evo because going after monads there is like shooting fish in a barrel.

- Riser pointed out Kirilenko's death but never pinned it on any corp. Think that was an early part of this play? Clipping a troublesome and powerful monad before they got away?
- Sunshine

- Kirilenko looks more and more like an inside job. Whether Evo or Vory it's not clear, but someone had to have cleared the way for those street punks to get him. And it wasn't Riser.
- Balladeer

First were two they were trying to soften, next I'll go after two they are trying to strengthen: Ares and Aztechnology. Not just because they both start with the letter A, but because they're both getting similar treatment, just in slightly different regions with a dangerous area of overlap.

NeoNET's actions with both have been all about cooperation in their rivals' home regions rather than competition. For both Ares and Aztechnology, this looks more like a lack of attempts to screw up their operation more than an actual message from the bosses to play nice. This means Ares and Aztechnology aren't necessarily aware of the lack of interference, but you can bet they're going to start getting suspicious if their intelligence offices are reporting a sudden drop in operations tied to NeoNET. That's going to lead them to want to know why—and that means work for us.

That first step shouldn't involve us much and really means a drop in business for the shadows, but the back end will make up for it. This little window also offers a great time for independent operators to work behind some misdirections that point to NeoNET if they're working against either of the big A's.

While most of the executives within NeoNET are going to follow the trend, some greedy middle manager is going to want to snag a little extra nuyen while everyone else is laying off or playing nice. This is going to lead to ops from on high ordered by executives who need to make an example of what happens to subordinates who look out for their own ends instead of efficiently following orders.

Horizon isn't a big target—it's part of the reason they've kept their seat on the Court—but they are taking excessive hits from NeoNET lately. The efforts seem to be part of their plan to divert focus onto the smaller megacorp if someone needs to be removed from the board. The biggest place they're trying to target is the corporation's use of their Singularity program and its apparent acceptance of monads. The corporation as a whole follows the will of the Singularity, and NeoNET is trying to run a smear campaign saying that the Singularity has been undermined by CFD, and that's why it's accepting the monads. Most of their efforts are on subsidiaries or corporations that have peripheral connections to Horizon and the ones that don't drink the kool-aid on a daily basis.

- It's created a lot of turmoil in Horizon's hometown of L.A., but the problems it's causing are riling up the PCC. Rumors are swirling about Horizon subsidizing the PCC and a second nationcorp joining the Corp Court.
- Traveler Jones

- Horizon has done a lot to help represent Native American issues thanks to their connection to the PCC. It would be nice to see a truly Tribal-supporting corp on the CC.
- Mika

- Yes. But which tribe would they support? ;)
- Lyran

Efforts to work the Court against their smallest member wouldn't be complete without efforts to bolster Wuxing and pull them further ahead of Horizon. NeoNET has been coordinating to help Wuxing update their Matrix infrastructure, while Wuxing has been easing shipping costs on most of NeoNET's physical products. The move has created some rifts with AAs that had NeoNET shipping business, but someone near the top just doesn't care.

- Word coming down from up high is a great way to strain relationships between execs who have worked out deals and been working together for a long time. It gets personal after you work together long enough. Plenty of problems are coming from the fallout, and corporate problems mean jobs in the shadows.
- Mr. Bonds

- Wuxing is doing almost all of NeoNET's black shipping these days. Most of it is hidden among their regular products but private shipments do occur. These are being targeted by other megas looking to strain their relationship, especially Maersk. They don't like losing the business they had thanks to NeoNET's European contingent.
- Ma'fan

Last up is the most worrisome—a look at the Japanacorps: MCT, Renraku, and Shiawase. As one might expect from the history NeoNET has with Renraku and Shiawase execs via their Fuchi past, you can be certain nothing positive will come their way. MCT, on the other hand, is in for some beneficial opportunities based on NeoNET's efforts against the other Japanacorps.

MCT should up their net worth thanks to NeoNET's efforts but could easily shoot themselves in the foot if they don't choose to slack off a little on the outside Nippon cooperation initiative that they have thrived with thus far. They don't need to completely turn against their allies, but they may need to look the other way when NeoNET goes after them.

- They'll most certainly be a solid number two if something were to happen to NeoNET.
- Mihoshi Oni

- With the struggles Ares is going through, it would leave a Euro-based and Japanese-based megacorp at the top of the heap, with no Americorp in sight.
- Sticks

But the issues of MCT are a mixed bag. While they can benefit from NeoNET's efforts to weaken their fellow Japanacorps, NeoNET still has some grievances against MCT. The big names at the top of both corps have been battling it out for decades, and this is one of the first times we might get to see what happens when one of them goes down hard. A lot of skeletons may start falling out of rice paper closets over this. The more recent events (so the stuff the kids in the shadows will remember and not just look at as a payday because the old people are fighting) come from Boston and St. Louis. MCT had a hand in the Boston incident as part of Project Vulcan. Rumors actually involve Pax and a cult of Dissonance-worshipping technomancers who span the world, not just Boston, being infiltrated into MCT. NeoNET supposedly knows all about it. In St. Louis, MCT has been using their influence with the local Yakuza as well as construction companies and affiliates to slow and stall the work on NeoNET's HQ in the city.

With all this, expect NeoNET to bring some pressure against MCT for their part in Boston. If this was street level, we could expect some kind of plan to take everyone down with them, but these are corporate executives. They want to build their golden parachute as opposed to changing the system. The work involving Boston will probably pull a few dissonant technos into the dark labs and maybe toss some more serious technomancer flak toward MCT.

- Or maybe they can do some good and help free some of the technomancers already buried in the MCT dark labs.
- Netcat

Renraku earned their bulls-eye a long time ago with their acquisition of a piece of the Fuchi pie. Shadow ops from NeoNET are going after the new friendly public image initiative that the once-feared Red Samurai megacorporation is taking. Runners will find themselves inserting code into mundane household drones that are going to create some unpleasant reminders of the past. The move will parallel the new informational news campaign that compares the Renraku Arcology disaster and Boston, while spinning the possibility of it being Renraku's fault. Even though the public still won't get the whole story, NeoNET will push things towards Renraku, rather than going down alone.

On a more devious note, NeoNET is actively working to damage the Fuchi brand. Though most of the Fuchi product line comes out of NeoNET, small portions are still made from within the Renraku fold. If NeoNET collapses, the Fuchi name could be used more extensively by Renraku. Operations from NeoNET against assets within NeoNET, in particular Fuchi, are occurring with increasing frequency. The shadows are raking in the nuyen while the Fuchi brand name is being run through the mud thanks to faulty products, coding errors, and poor service.

Last, but certainly not least, is the direct attack NeoNET has been performing against the middle management of Renraku. Contracts that seem to be clearing out mid-level execs are popping up with ties back to NeoNET. The effort would serve to create fear within the ranks of Renraku but more importantly could create a large gap between the upper and lower management tiers. Things like that have been known to create revolutions within a corporation.

- This is no joke. I just did some work on upgrading my deck and bought genuine Fuchi parts. I was field testing some commuter links when my bag starts smoking and my whole deck fries out. It was AR work, so no dumpshock, but I had to book it off the train to avoid the pawns. Got home, opened the deck up, and all the brand-new Fuchi parts were a blackened plastic glob.
- Slamm-0!

- Work on the middle managers of Renraku is great practice work for up-and-coming hitters. Security isn't too tough and some errors can be managed. Pay usually isn't great, but neither is the challenge.
- Balladeer

- Wise to make sure that's who you're really going after. Other corps already onto NeoNET's efforts have been using it as a chance to hit more secure targets under the guise of middle management. Sucks to think you're going after Joe Sarariman only to discover your mark has some really deep shadow connections.
- Mihoshi Oni

- Also, Nakatomi has been providing extra security for any of his hand-picked executive choices that might be in NeoNET's sights. A black suit doesn't make a Red Samurai any less deadly.
- Thorn

- It does make them easier to shoot!
- Kane

Shiawase got the other piece of Fuchi, so they're going to suffer from brand damage as well. That's a down-the-road concern, though, and NeoNET is giving them plenty to worry about today by going after their energy divisions and sewing distrust against the Imperial family of Japan.

As a major symbol of the megacorporation's history and successes, their energy division is central to the image of Shiawase. NeoNET will by no means bring down the entire division, but they aren't trying to cripple Shiawase—just get in some parting shots on the way out the door. Expect to see them contracting attacks on power plants and setting up accidents to create issues over

dirty energy. Targets will be sites that have connections to other megacorps so that disruptions in power and services create discord between the companies, not just within Shiawase.

- The SunGen plant was definitely a NeoNET target. Especially with the aftermath that revealed their solar energy was being supplemented by a nuclear reactor under the facility.
- Sunshine

Much as they've done with many of the other corps, NeoNET isn't letting the entire CFD story fall on them, and they're spreading the negative PR around. In the case of Shiawase, they're going big with claims that the Imperial family has become riddled with head cases among their ranks due to Shiawase tech. The end goal would be to create international distrust due to the connection but along the way it means a lot of shadow ops to create the illusion. Just to clarify, I actually don't know if it's true or not. It's a lofty campaign and not likely to stick, but it will help divert attention while NeoNET is trying to weather the storm.

- I hope NeoNET actually comes through all this. It would be great to see the fallout of all these moves come back to bite them in the hoop. Not that I don't like the idea of a megacorp falling, but I like the idea of them stumbling, trying to act like an angry child, and then falling when everyone else comes back at them for the drek they've pulled.
- Bull

I'll wrap this up with just a few words. NeoNET may look like it's on its way out the door, but they're not done making our shadowlives more interesting. If they're going down, the smart runner is snagging every bit of cash they can from their lucrative collapse and even considering running some money grab double-crosses because they know those Johnsons are going to follow NeoNET down the drain. It ain't the wisest move, but we shoot people in the face for money—we're not the wisest folks.

RENRAKU

Tomoe Minamoto had noticed the entry into her room minutes ago, but she only lifted her head when her prayers were finished. The shrine to her father, Yoritomo Minamoto, was open before her, fresh incense burning as an offering. Rather than the armor that she thought of as a second skin, she was clad in a bright blue *furisode*, decorated with soft white snowflakes. It was her mother's, and the formal ceremony of the afternoon called for no less. Resting at the foot of her father's shrine was his *daisho*, passed to his only child after he died at the Renraku Arcology seventeen years ago. She had been a child when they were handed to her, unable to truly understand what it meant. Today, she would be accepted as a Red Samurai, the first woman ever given such an honor.

Her guest cleared his throat behind her.

"The ceremony is still two hours away, Ieyoshi-san, is it not?"

"Hai, Minamoto-san but ... again, I must ask that you not attend."

Still facing the shrine, Tomoe pulled up her long mane of hair, using a silken ribbon to tie it into place. "That would be foolish, Ieyoshi-san. I was second in the class in the katana, third in unarmed combat, and first in sharpshooting. My place will be one of honor."

"Forgive me, Tomoe-san, but there is no place for you in the Red Samurai."

There was the briefest of pauses before her hands fluttered over the bow in her hair. "There is my father's place."

"Were you his son, this is true."

"My father had only one child. It is my legacy. There is no other."

She heard him step closer, taking a knee as his voice fell. "If there is no son, there is no legacy. Do not dishonor him, I beg you."

She shook her head, rolling smoothly from her knees to her feet with a practiced grace. "There is no way that I could dishonor him. You know me, Ieyoshi-san. I will not be moved from my path."

Without turning to face him, she could still feel his eyes nervously darting. "You cannot walk a path if it is removed! Please, I beg you, allow me to return to Shigitada-sama, to tell him you see no need to—"

The rustle of her kimono was soft, but the motion of her father's *daisho* being tucked into her *obi* was firm. "I will not."

Was it a whimper? Surely he did not shed a tear, but Ieyoshi's voice shook as he said, "Then forgive me."

The door to her room opened, and beyond it stood two corporate samurai, flanking a smaller, older man whose crimson armor was unmistakable. "Minamoto Tomoe," he stated evenly, formally using her family name before her given, "You are to come with me."

"The ceremony has yet to begin, Shigitada-sama. I should not appear before the others."

"You will not be appearing at all." A moment's pause, before he evenly added, "We have been made aware that you cheated on your written exam. You are being expelled."

She made the smallest of motions, glancing over one shoulder. "This is a lie," she stated simply.

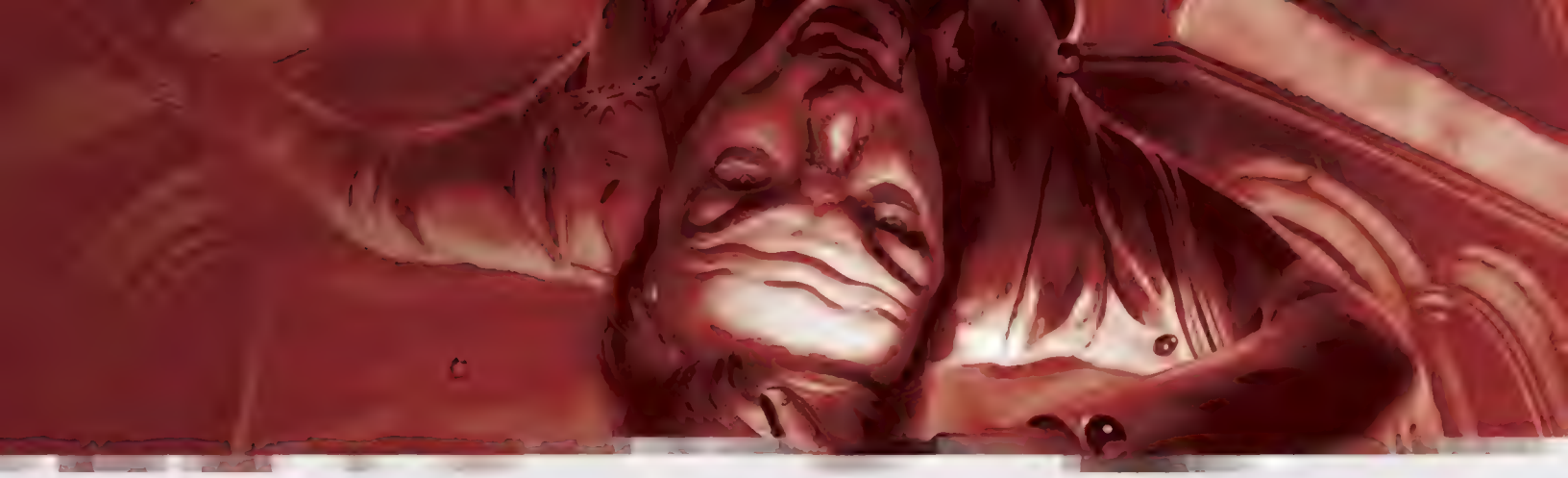
"Three of your classmates have stepped forward to state this truth. Due to your father's legacy, you will be allowed to serve as an ordinary samurai, but you are not to be allowed the Red Oath."

"Bring me these men and I will force the truth from either their lips or their heart's blood."

Ieyoshi's voice fluttered up, "It has been decided, Tomoe-san. You must not resist."

At last, she turned to face them all, her left hand gripping the *saya* of her blade, her thumb tucked beneath the *tsuba* of the katana. "I fear that I must."

In 2078, for the 49th year in a row, no woman was elevated to the office of Red Samurai. The class is notable for mourning the loss of one Tomoe Minamoto, only child of Yoritomo Minamoto. Her promising life came to an end at the age of twenty-one.



RENRAKU COMPUTER SYSTEMS

Corporate Slogan: "How may we serve you?"
Corporate Court Ranking (2077): #3
Corporate Status: AAA, public corporation
World Headquarters: Chiba, Japan
CEO (Honorary): Inazo Aneki
President: Orito Sasaki
Major Shareholders: None (no one owns more than ten percent of Renraku's stock.)
Major Divisions: Renraku Asia, Renraku North America, Renraku South America, Renraku Europa, Renraku Africa, Renraku Oceania
Notable Subsidiaries: Adams-Westlake Mediawork, Architectural Dynamics, Armada Personne, Australian Development Corporation, Australian Institute of Magical Research, Australian Telecom Services, Baid Communications, Bharat Petroleum, Blohm & Voss GmbH, Champion Financial, Comcast Corporation, EuroFact, EuroSoft, FactFiles, Ferrarius Medical, Festival Foods, Freeman Industries, Fuchi Corporate Services, Ganbare Aerospace, Gaz-Niki, Genecraft, GloBank, GrideGuide, Harland & Wolf Nautical Designs, The Hitotsubashi Group, Hypersense, Iris Firmware, Isuzu Motors, Izom Armaments, LGSK Electronic Holdings, The Mizuho Group, Najimi Securities, Neo-Police Deployment, Nestlé S.A., Rees Arcana, Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines ltd, Securitech International, Shin Chou Kyogo, Socratic Education Group, Teracotta Armaments, Tetradyne Matrix Systems, Ultimax, Underwater Living, Wacky Brothers Animation, Wakatta Software, Xiao Technologies
Dominant Business Language: Japanese
Secondary Business Languages: Any

FACING EAST

- We've been trying to contact Renraku Fox for an update, but they've gone underground recently and that left us without a good source on Seattle's favorite corp. Imagine my surprise when someone here stepped up and volunteered for the job. Now imagine the face I made when I saw who it was.
- Bull

- It's fun to assume I don't know stuff, I know.
- Haze

- The frag?! Bull, you know this piece of drek's no good! Hell, why does he even still have an account?
- Pistons

- His rep score's in the crapper, Pistons, but he pays it up by working like this. I might further add that I haven't seen your name on a byline for quite a while...
- Glitch

WHAT HAS COME BEFORE

It's still normal to start these things off with a history lesson, right? Good, as Renraku's got some interesting skeletons tucked into corners. Believe me, I'm as surprised as you on some of this. Ol' Foxy was holding out. Let's dig in the dirt!

IN THE BEGINNING ...

The Corporation Eventually Known As Renraku began life as Keruba International, a munitions corporation out of Slovenia that made a killing in the first three decades of the twenty-first century when chaos was everywhere and everybody wanted a gun. KI managed to force its way onto the board of the Corporate Court, not making many friends in the process. In the wake of the first Crash, no one really shed a tear over the utter ruination of Keruba, but one man smelled opportunity. That man was Inazo Aneki.

- Aneki (or more properly Aneki-Inazo-no-Kami these days) was a hotshot corporate raider who'd cut his teeth

at Shiawase. The higher-ups disregarded him, since he wasn't family, and he eventually went into business for himself. This was during the bad years for Shiawase, when a series of moderate-to-failing CEOs stepped into Emori Shiawase's giant shoes and were found wanting. Had they been a bit more open, history could have been quite different.

- Mr. Bonds

Aneki mentions in his autobiography that he'd originally intended on gutting the corp for parts, but something in it caught his eye (namely, that Corporate Court seat) and, rather than dismantle it, he moved it to Chiba, sold a few parts off, emptied his personal portfolio, and rebuilt it under an umbrella corporation, Renraku Computer Systems. Keruba still exists, renamed Izom Armaments, and is firmly grasped in the talons of Renraku's holding company. It's the Golden Ticket that gives them a permanent seat on the Corporate Court.

- Aneki and then-Shiawase CEO Hideo Shiawase had a lot of discussions right before the move to Chiba. It seems that a truce of sorts was struck, where Shiawase wouldn't destroy the young corporation in return for a certain number of votes in the Corporate Court. Aneki held up his end of the bargain even after Hideo was turfed (as was his successor, and *her* successor), earning a lot of good favor from the assorted Japanacorps. Of course, those same votes earned scorn from the rest of the Big Seven, but as long as the Japanacorps stood together, they had nothing to fear.
- Baka Dabora

Aneki spent the early years as something of an understudy, the smallest of the Japancorps who was always happy to help the others and gobble up scraps from the table. In the '30s, Renraku was involved in rebuilding the global communications system, generally given the junk jobs that Fuchi didn't care to bother with, and the corp coasted to soft profits. Aneki himself got fat and lazy during this period, enjoying a level of wealth and power he'd never experienced before. He lost the razor edge that had gotten him here, and a coalition of executives made a move to oust him as CEO in the pursuit of profit. He woke up just in time, but turning aside the rebellion cost him the majority of his stock and no small degree of cash. As he got himself back in shape, he brought his corporation in line, trimming the fat (and most of those who had tried to remove him), emerging in under a decade as a top-five megacorp.

- Not all of the rebels got removed, including Surin Supachai. Supachai wasn't a ringleader, but he was a loyal soldier and talented. Aneki looked past the fight and promoted him.
- Icarus

- Plenty of room for promotions after a third of your top execs come for the boss's head.
- Rigger X

- Funny thing about Aneki: He didn't hold grudges. You see him work with Shiawase after leaving them, with the other Japanacorps while honoring his deal, and even with some of the coup planners who plotted against him. This calmness runs through Renraku as a whole, allowing them to work with others on a regular basis. He understood how people work, and while he'd reward loyalty, he didn't necessarily punish betrayal. Ironic, considering what comes soon.
- Kia

THREE YEARS IN HEAVEN

With the death of newly-elected president Dunklezahn, the dragon's will delivered a sizable number of Renraku shares to Miles Lanier, the right hand of Richard Villiers. Villiers was one-third of Fuchi, the second-largest megacorporation at the time. Lanier's move from deep inside Fuchi to sitting on the board of directors of Renraku was met with no small degree of unease, but he did what he could to win over his new peers on the board. Renraku deckers were suddenly slashing through Fuchi defenses as if they weren't there, while product development beat Fuchi to market with their own designs. Numerous citizens who were unhappy with their station but unable to hop suddenly found themselves the targets of extractions to new Renraku-owned pastures. Fuchi buckled under the strain, with two-thirds of the owners firmly accusing Villiers of selling them out. The stock market noticed, and Fuchi shares plummeted, dropped, then plummeted again.

While this dog-and-pony show was up in front, Renraku gained two secret sources of innovation. The first is Dr. Antonio Vieri of Milan, an eccentric genius whose optical processors were a generation ahead of anything else of the day. The latter was the young AI being born in Renraku's Self-Contained Industrial-Residential Environment, the monster known as Deus.

- That was Morgan the Mother. You know nothing of Deus. *Nothing.*
- Puck

- Dr. Vieri is rumored to be part of a hacking group calling itself "Leonardo," which used the Vitruvian Man as a group symbol. Records are spotty due to the second crash.
- Pistons

- Supposedly, Keith Hannigan was the leader of that outfit.
- Plan 9

- It wasn't "The Suit". He was, is, and despite my best efforts, always will be, a Mitsuhama man.
- Icarus

Through the rest of 2057, all of 2058, and most of 2059, Renraku was the golden goose, finding technological advances one after another, punching through Matrix defenses seemingly at will while making money hand over fist. Their stock value raced to the stratosphere while Fuchi's wilted, and Renraku found itself the second-most valuable corporation in the world, vaulting past Fuchi and threatening to take the tail of the dragon itself, Saeder-Krupp.

THREE YEARS IN HELL

In hindsight, Lanier being a double-agent is obvious, and his sudden and inevitable betrayal was seen as a vintage Villiers masterstroke in most historical accounts. Fuchi brought a legal assault to the Corporate Court, alleging insider trading and rampant piracy of its intellectual property by Renraku, all masterminded by Lanier. The exact arguments, and the final vote, is sealed up in the ZO, but we know some details: Lanier was forced to sell his stock to the Court at the value he'd acquired it rather than the current value, and he was sent to Fuchi in chains. While the court deliberates, some kind of virus goes through Renraku's Matrix core, erasing yottapulses of data. This virus might be what drives Deus mad, as he soon locks the SCIRE down. Renraku stock, already hurt by the cheap sale, plunges into freefall and takes Fuchi stock with it as a panic sell-off ensues. Villiers unlocks his old friend Lanier's chains, and the two of them pluck several plums from Fuchi's frame, then break away to make Novatech. Fuchi's remaining two stockholders knife-fight over what's left, and Samantha Villiers holds the last piece to give one or the other complete control. She sells her stake, and Fuchi falls to a majority owner just in time to die. Nakatomi takes his half of the corporation and buys himself into Renraku, while Korin Yamana takes his half and buys into Shiawase.

Oh, and Aneki dies.

- He got his head scrambled in the SCIRE after he and a shadowrunning team broke in to take down Deus. They spent a few years trying to rebuild him, even drawing on the imprisoned Dr. Sherman Huang to work his magic, but all the king's horses couldn't put him back together again. Officially, he died peacefully in his sleep. Unofficially, they tore his brain apart looking for clues. And cue Plan 9…
- Glitch

- … to tell you that Aneki isn't dead. They saved his brain using tech from Dr. Vieri and have kept him around using cybermancy magic they got from Nakatomi. It's why he's still listed as CEO; once they have a way to transfer his brain from a cyberzombie body to a new cloned one, he'll step out and reclaim his corporation.
- Plan 9

- Trust me, Aneki's dead. Stone cold dead.
- Netcat

THE GHOST DECADE

Halley's Comet shows up and the Ring of Fire celebrates by blowing up Japan. The Japanacorps pull back to rebuild the homeland and deal with the general magical madness that follows, with Renraku under the leadership of Haruhiko "Harry" Nakada, former chief operations officer for over a decade elevated to president over Yukiako Watanabe. The next ten years aren't pretty as the Second Crash follows the comet. As a corporation based on the Matrix, Renraku doesn't take it well at all. Nakatomi uses this time to force out rivals and twist arms to get himself named as the chair of the board. President Nakada commits a very public suicide, falling onto his sword in shame for his mismanagement of the corporation, signaling a cleansing from a decade of failure and leaving a fresh start for his replacement, Orito Sasaki.

RENRAKU TODAY

While the corp is technically led by President Sasaki, everyone knows that it's really Shikei Nakatomi who's running the show. His rebuild of the Renraku model, focusing on the cross-pollination of the database division with the rest of the corp, has come into maturity and unleashed a new megacorporate model on the world. While not ashamed of their brand, Renraku's taken to presenting subsidiaries without the Renraku brand, sacrificing some worldwide recognition for stronger local loyalty. They still retain the strength of their supply chain and intelligent design to make certain that goods arrive where needed, on time, and at a profit. It's not exciting, but it's beautifully executed.

IT'S ALL IN WHO YOU KNOW

It's important to note that there are no majority shareholders of Renraku; no one owns more than ten percent, and just three percent ownership is enough to get you a seat on the board of directors. There've been a few chairs changed in the past five years, so let's see who wound up where.

CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD, SHIKEI NAKATOMI

Happy eightieth birthday, "Business Butcher"! Hope you choke on your cake. Shikei is the son of Kiyoshi Nakatomi, founder of Dekita Industries, which merged with Yamana Electronics to form Fuchi Industrial Electronics back in 2017. Kiyoshi refused to bring Richard Villiers into the Fuchi fold in 2032 and was soon murdered by his chauffeur. Shikei took his father's place and let Villiers in, giving Fuchi cyberdeck technology but also starting the three-way dance that defined that corporation until it dissolved.

- You might think that Nakatomi's always hated Villiers for (allegedly) having his father murdered but this isn't the case. They worked together against Yamana, or Nakatomi and Yamana against Villiers, or Villiers and Yamana against Nakatomi, depending on who had too much power at the time. The Butcher owed his position to Villiers, after all.
- Rigger X

- True to a point, but while he was willing to work with him before, he blames Villiers for the death of Fuchi and he took that personally. There's no man watching Boston's lockdown more happily than Shikei Nakatomi.
- Mr. Bonds

As Fuchi curled up and died in '61, Nakatomi bought his way into Renraku with Fuchi's Asian assets, then spent the next decade gradually fighting his way up the boardroom until he took the big chair. He doesn't have enough stock to control the board—no one does—but he has a proven track record and utterly no scruples about crushing his rivals. He rules through fear, first and foremost, but he generally keeps his ruthlessness aimed at profitability, not petty vengeance. There's no money in revenge.

- He's never trusted leónization, but I hear from a reliable source that it wouldn't do much for him as he's eighty percent metal under that business suit. Fuchi was always a leading player in cybernetics, while Chiba's always been known for the best of the best. As long as he can keep replacing worn-out parts, he'll stick around.
- Bull

The move into a larger service basis for Renraku's economy was largely his idea, perhaps figuring that metahumans would react fearfully to the rise of technomancers and artificial intelligences and shun anything too uncontrollable. It seems that, in this, he was ahead of the curve and is now reaping the benefits. The new Matrix may be sold as unhackable, but Nakatomi knows otherwise and is positioning his corporation to take advantage of anyone who wants a more human experience.

- Wait. Doesn't Renraku hire AIs?
- Netcat

- "Keep your friends close and your enemies closer."
- Puck

- Remember when I said that he doesn't have enough shares to run the board? Sometimes you have to trade

horses to get what you want, and it seems that there's a sub-faction of stock owners that are big backers of AI research. They're the ones that Dr. Sherman Huang drew money from for his work that led to Deus, and despite the small setback that followed are still supporters. He must have needed their votes for something he had planned.

- Haze

- Or is planning.
- Icarus

PRESIDENT ORITO SASAKI

Regarded by some as Nakatomi's Yes Man, Sasaki was head of Renraku America and part of the Manhattan Consortium for years, where he was known for brains, not sharp elbows. A graduate (summa cum laude) of MIT&T's business school, Sasaki, like Nakatomi, never lets personal feelings interfere with work. Where they differ is in Sasaki's data-driven approach, where he simply does not move without analyzing every scrap of information versus Nakatomi's gut instinct. This educated approach did him remarkably well in the FactFiles division of Renraku America (home of GridGuide, SeaSearch, and a dozen more indexers), but as president he's not as skilled in the more personal game of shaking hands, making deals, and winning new clients through his (non-existent) charisma. That said, no one this side of Lofwyr seems to know his corporation inside and out like Sasaki, and he's a master of budgeting, finance, and market prediction.

- It's true that Sasaki isn't much of a people person, but it's due to his heavy preference for logic over emotion. He calmly sits back, weighs the pros and cons of an action, and simply refuses to act rashly. This unwillingness to take risks is why Butcher Nakatomi trusts him so much; he knows that Sasaki won't go off the rails for some personal matter.
- Baka Dabora

- If you looked up "Japanacorp Executive," you'd find Sasaki's picture plastered by every entry. He's as bland as bland can be, cut from the perfect mold: Japanese human male who just turned sixty before his promotion, with a stable family life, a love for his corporation, and not a vice to be found aside from a rare bit of after-hours karaoke and a tolerance for alcohol that would put a dozen fratboys under a table. I'd say he was a robot, but they have personality matrices these days.
- Kat o' NineTales

CEO ETERNAL INAZO ANEKI

The sharp-eyed runner might have noticed that Sasaki holds the title of president, not CEO. This is because the quite deceased Aneki holds it in perpetuity. I should explain. Aneki was given a trinket in Dunkelzahn's will that gave him access to Tibet, the mysterious nation that's been sealed off since not long after the Awakening. A devout Buddhist who was recovering from the loss of the Renraku arcology in Seattle, Aneki accepted the item, then stepped into the mists and vanished. He was declared legally dead in '65, with the CEO position retired and granted to him perpetuity in memory of his decades of service. Today he's reached a mythic status, with his books required reading in corporate educational facilities while shrines to him are found tucked away in any large living center. He's become a sort of kami, a spirit that embodies the corporation, and his spirit is often called on to grant citizens the will to complete a project by a deadline, lend them his charm so that they can perform better in an interview for a promotion, and so on. He's dead, but his spirit lives on. Metaphorically.

THE MORE YOU KNOW

Corporate Kami: A Japanese concept of a spirit that watches over a corporation, analogous to a patron saint.

- With his death, half of his nine-percent share of the corporate stock went to the Buddhist priesthood. They later liquidized all but one percent of this, but they remain on the board as advisors. A combination of this, Nakatomi's take-over as chair, and trying to cozy up to the Japanese emperor led to a reversal of the long-held non-religious view of Renraku. Worship, in virtually any form, is now not only tolerated, but encouraged, and closeted believers were able to set out their shrines, crosses, or prayer rugs. It should be noted that Renraku doesn't elevate any one religion over another, preferring to let people follow whatever's local, but as the home office is in Japan, Buddhism and Shinto are seen most often at the highest levels.
- Elijah

- You'll get rumors of Aneki's return now and then, saying that he's been reborn in the form of a young Tibetan boy who stepped out of the mist and was whisked away by a Renraku helicopter that was waiting at the exact right time and place for his arrival. Or that he's uploaded his mind to a central Renraku database (often the ACHE in Seattle!), that his ghost pops up in Nakatomi's office and shares wisdom from beyond the grave, etc. No one can ever produce any evidence, of course.
- Netcat

- You dismiss eyewitnesses as biased, you say photos are doctored, you say email is hacked ... there's plenty of evidence, you just refuse to accept it.
- Plan 9

- Here's one for the Plan 9 files: Dead or not, Aneki's astral form has been talking with Wu Lung-Wei in the astral shadow around Wuxing Tower (or so say some sources I have). The discussions have been something about Wu acquiring a Tibetan artifact that's connected to Aneki's soul. The rumors aren't the most credible, but in this world of ours, how much do we really know?
- Winterhawk

- Aw drek. Is Inazo Aneki the new Juan Atzcapotzalco?
- Bull

BOTAN NAKADA

The son of former president Harry Nakada (his official spot in China will be detailed in a bit) inherited some of his father's shares (they were split between himself at three percent and his sister at one percent), which grants him a seat on the board. He has a voting proxy, but it's expected that he'll eventually step up and take it over in person once he's mastered his own skills as a corporate shark. It's rumored that he's in deep with the Yakuza and a member of the Watada-Rengo, but I've never seen him shirtless to confirm this. Ares tried to snap him up back in '71, but the extraction failed. He seems to have taken that personally and threw himself hard into Renraku's military side, trying to inflict some damage on Ares' bottom line. The failure of the Ares Excalibur was a moment of great glee for him, and he used it as a wedge to crack into markets all across warring China and in many other Asian nations. Nakada's got a personal code of honor that's a mile wide and is a firm believer of Bushido. He's not augmented, but he trains with the Red Samurai all the same.

THE MORE YOU KNOW

China: A shorthand reference to the nations of Manchuria, Mongolia, the Republic of China, Henan, Shaanxi, Ningxia, Gansu, Sichuan, Guangxi, Yunnan, the Kashin State, the Shan State, Tibet, Hainan, the Canton Confederation, and the Coastal Provinces. See also: Warlord China.

WHERE'S THE PARTY?

Renraku splits its corporate empire up into regional divisions, rather than organizing by market segment. This makes life a tad more difficult for R&D, as the best chemists are split over several continents instead of focused in one area, but it also allows each division to focus on products and services that are better tailored to the local market. This also makes it much harder to land a staggering blow against the corporation; the loss of any R&D lab will hurt, but there are several more similar divisions that can pick up the work and continue while the damaged one is rebuilt. Easier to disrupt, harder to kill; a strategy that allowed it to survive even the loss of the Seattle Arcology. Each corporate division has a director in the role of divisional CEO, their own board of directors who are in general command of the region, plus the usual alphabet soup of execs ... COO, CFO, etc. The home office, via Renraku Computer System's primary board of directors, sets a general agenda and the regional offices execute that agenda. Unlike the home office's line up of (almost entirely male) Japanese humans, the regional boards tend to be more diverse and feature one or two locals promoted to visible positions. Putting a local face into the role of director allows them to present someone acceptable to the local culture, who speaks the local language, and who understands how to schmooze in ways that others couldn't. The board, of course, is always majority Japanese and are the ones who actually make decisions, but the local media always treat the director as if he were the one responsible for everything, good or bad, while the board stays quiet in the shadows. Kind of like in the UCAS, where people assume the president does everything but it's really Congress.

RENRAKU ASIA

Director: Kaori Eto

The most profitable arm of Renraku by a considerable margin, Renraku Asia is the favorite son of the corporation, given the largest budget (fitting, since it draws the largest profit). It is also seen as the cradle from which the best execs rise. Outside of Japan, where all of the Japanacorps struggle for position, Renraku is *the* dominant force in Asia as a whole. Most subdivisions threaten AA status in and of themselves, and taken as a whole, nearly a third of Renraku's business happens here. Programming is the core element, naturally, but production (thanks to Renraku Asia: China) and entertainment (thanks to Renraku Asia: India) isn't far behind. The most stable sector is agricultural, a steady source of income that subsidizes the riskier work of other departments.

At the head of Renraku Asia: Japan is Kaori Eto, the president of this region as well as director of the entire Asian division, a certified genius who was once the lead researcher in AI development under the brilliant but eccentric Dr. Sherman Huang. Eto is far more comfortable in the lab than in the boardroom, but his overall vision for technology and the Matrix is vital to proper business operation. He regrets his elevation, but it came with the ability to allocate the budget to his pet projects, which has salved the wound of not being directly involved in day-to-day research.

- Eto is much more comfortable with machines than people, is known as a pro-AI and technomancer voice, and

is arguably the CEO-ish figure who knows the most about technology with the possible exception of Damian "David Gavilan" Knight. He's that smart.

- Pistons

- Rumor has it that he discovered the Foundation.
- Plan 9

- What rumor, where? You need to start sourcing.
- Snopes

- This is where the work on Mousetraps has been happening. (For those who don't know, the original Mousetrap was intended to gobble up Deus, but he was able to get away by shattering himself into a thousand and twenty-four pieces.) When the world started to rebuild after Crash 2.0, the discovery of feral AIs made them go back and start work on the traps again. Today, they're the blackest of research, devices that, at least in theory, can vacuum up an AI's entire being and store it like a genie in a bottle. I've never seen one in person, but I've heard enough to put them past urban legend.
- Hanibelle

- The idea terrifies all digital lifeforms. The idea that they can be plucked from the Matrix and placed in a jar on someone's shelf ... it's horrifying.
- Netcat

- Now you start to understand why they were led—practically forced—to create the CFD virus.
- Icarus

RENRAKU ASIA: INDIA

One billion potential customers. That phrase should tell you how important India is to the overall picture. Sure, Renraku entertainment draws heavily from Bollywood, and the massive labor pool allows them to wire up assembly lines on the cheap, but that consumer market is larger than North America and Europe combined. True, they don't have the finances of the wealthier countries, but when a billion people all need to eat, buy clothes, and travel from point A to point B, Renraku's there to make a profit from it. The regional HQ is the Calcutta Arcology, but there's a secondary arcology in Mumbai.

- Rarely mentioned is Renraku's strength in construction in India, where it doesn't have to compete with Saeder-Krupp or Ares. Of course, this means that they're also in tight with the sand mafia.
- Kia

- Renraku has several water bottling plants in the Himalayas, under their Nestlé brand.
- Nephrine

THE MORE YOU KNOW

Sand Mafia: An organized crime ring in India that dredges sand from rivers, including federally protected ones, in order to sell that sand to construction firms. Water-tumbled sand has properties that wind-blown sand cannot match as a building material.

- The unregulated Indian labor market also allows Renraku to process materials and chemicals that they can't do elsewhere, such as asbestos, which they import from their mine in Wittenoom, Australia.
- The Smiling Bandit

RENRAKU ASIA: CHINA

Botan Nakada's playground, RA:C is the biggest market for Terracotta Armaments, whose stock has gone up considerably as Ares suffers. In addition to selling weapons to both governments and rebels, nuyen flows in from the agricultural regions of the warring Chinese states, topped off with exploitable labor.

- Both India and China have huge populations of the destitute, which Renraku taps for both indentured servants and mail-order brides, shipping women (and some men) worldwide, in chipped and unchipped versions. You won't see it often in North America, but owning at least one is a standard perk past middle management elsewhere. Needless to say, prostitution is just one more service where Renraku excels.
- SeaTac Sweetie

RENRAKU ASIA: INDONESIA

Primarily important for the massive plantations that produce a staggering volume of palm oil, RA:I also features the Jakarta Arcology, the center for Renraku's Asian linguistic programs and a significant selection of FIRE services.

- Ordinarily, Renraku and Wuxing manage to avoid one another, despite both being heavily invested in the region. Renraku doesn't do much in banking, insurance, or magic, Wuxing doesn't really do Matrix tech or common services, so they can co-exist easily. With both swooping in on warlord China as the reputation for Ares shrivels, however, we're seeing rather direct competition in one area. This could get larger.
- Red Anya

RENRAKU OCEANIA

Director: Noriko Sakai

Only spun off from Renraku Asia four years ago, Renraku Oceania is the smallest division of Renraku as well

as the most experimental. The highest-risk, highest-reward programs are generally hosted here, leading to a mostly bust/sometimes boom division whose gains are replicated while the failures are buried. Renraku Oceania is also the home to Renraku's comparatively small magic research sections.

RENRAKU OCEANIA: AUSTRALIA

The largest division by far, RO: Australia is most famous for monitoring the manastorms of the Outback and the recent semi-successful attempt to green the Outback. The growth, featuring genespliced fauna that was then saturated by corporate magicians using an as-yet unnamed metamagical technique, was successful, but the resource-poor soil of Australia wasn't able to sustain it, and it withered and dried up in only six weeks, depleting the soil entirely in the process. It's hoped that further research could lead to multiple yields a year from healthier fields, but the long-term cost for short-term gain could prove too large a hurdle to overcome.

- Sakai is the daughter of "Noble President" Orito Sakai and has had several attempts on her life from inside the corp. She dismissed her Red Samurai, no longer trusting them, and replaced them with the so-called Blue Samurai, an elven cadre pulled from Tir Taingire. Rumor is that the metamagic techniques they were trying also hail from there, and she's been romantically linked to the Telestrian family.
- Hard Exit

- Here's a weird one for you: After the Greening, a handful of magical researchers were relocated to Alabama, of all places.
- Nephrine

- Near Space City? Weird. They've had several flights there from Amazonia as well.
- Marcos

RENRAKU OCEANIA: PHILIPPINES

The only Japanacorp allowed to operate in the Philippines, Renraku's headquarters is an underwater arcology that the locals were watching closely, but which followed the rules without raising a fuss. When the Baihu Corporation was destroyed during the dragon war, Renraku stepped in and began hiring locals, pumping desperately needed liquidity into the economy. In two years, they'd spread out to have at least partial ownership of nearly a third of the island chain's economy. They're as yet unwilling to buy armaments from Renraku, but the Filipinos have accepted Renraku as a whole. It's kind of amazing to see how they managed to direct hate toward Mitsuhama and Shiawase while having virtually none stick to their own skin. If you want to see how Renraku integrates itself as a native corporation, go to the Philippines and marvel.

- It isn't universal. Marionette still remembers, but she has family back in the islands that treat Renraku as saviors.
- Turbo Bunny

- There's still so much that we don't know about the dragon war. Hey Bull! You still have Orange Queen's contact info? We should totally drop her an invite.
- Slamm-0!

- I should think that Hestaby has more important things to do than be pestered by the likes of you.
- Glitch

- You might be surprised.
- Orange Queen.

- ... oh frag.
- Slamm-0!

RENRAKU EUROPA

Director: Karl Stadt

Europa is a hard division, flanked by Saeder-Krupp, NeoNET, and Shiawase, finding little room to grow. The focus on the service industry is strong here, but database operation and Matrix defenses remain their key source of income. After Lofwyr showed his claw by taking Europe's Matrix offline during the second Crash, Renraku's done booming business with paranoiacs who believe there's a golden snout poking into every corner of the EuroMatrix. Renraku's normal society-blend ability helps it survive, with scores of small stores scattered about every EuroNation, run by natives, featuring native products and well-tailored services. The dragon's certainly aware of most, if not all, of those connections, but it's hard to apply pressure on them when the locals come to their defense so strongly. Then again, Lofwyr has bigger issues to deal with right now.

Director Stadt considers himself Lofwyr's equal in corporate matters. This seems ludicrous until you recall that he's been running Europa for nearly three decades without Golden Snout biting his head off. It's generally a dance between the two, with Stadt never matching strength with Saeder-Krupp, instead flexing where the dragon's weak and retreating where he's strong. Stadt's also been able to play "Let's you and him fight" numerous times, redirecting fire from Renraku to other corps time after time.

- Stadt was seen talking with Lugh Surehand on the Grand Tour two months ago. No idea what about, but I'm certain a mutual dance partner had to be discussed. It's the Grand Tour, after all.
- Thorn

- Stadt's main worry right now is that the Yamato Damashii might draw his Renraku in to help Shiawase. A direct confrontation with Saeder-Krupp is never a good idea, and Lofwyr would be all too happy to take apart some of Japan's finest executives while contemplating Mitsuhama.
- Balladeer

RENRAKU EUROPA: UNITED KINGDOM

Tourism is an important part of RE:UK, but the primary focus of this arm is in finance. Director Dan Richardson is part of Old Money London, with gentlemanly ties to upscale investors and the Old Boy Network. His integration into this world is more important than being a predictive guru, and his steady hand guides Renraku's financial ship well.

- Golden Boy, a financial AI of no small talent, asked to be transferred here from Oceania, but thus far has been refused. He's effective in Jakarta, but the larger sums he could manipulate in London could lead to a windfall.
- Netcat

- Maybe, but while Eto loves him, Renraku as a whole still has some issue with the AI world. Giving one access to your second-most-important financial firm after Neo-Tokyo is a risk that they aren't willing to take.
- Glitch

RENRAKU EUROPA: FRANCE

Renraku's got quite a few ties with the aristos of France. A regressive monarchist approach to ruling, invoking the good old days and having a disdain for metahumans? Yeah, Renraku can work with that.

RENRAKU AFRICA

Director: Nwabudike Freeman

Once a philanthropic arm of Renraku Europe, Renraku Africa's newly profitable design rests fully on the shoulders of one man. Freeman was born in the Kingdoms of Nigeria, survived being infected by VITAS-2, and built himself an industrial company in the aftermath of Africa's vast loss of life. He's a latecomer to the Renraku family, trading his A-rated company for enough stock to gain a seat on the African board, then parlayed that into the top position a few years later. A true capitalist with a heart of stone, Freeman has no use for religion or morals, putting profit first and foremost. His company's early work in ad-hoc commlink networks led to the eventual backbone of Africa's Renraku-engineered wireless Matrix, not as fast as those in Europe but with vastly longer ranges. I doubt he's satisfied where he's at. Expect to hear more of him in the future.

- "Industrial company," my hoop. Freeman Industries specialized in selling guns to any Nigerian warlord with nuyen, or natural resources, to wave around. He wanted Debeers, but Roxborough was faster. He's currently offering to take Izom off of Stadt's hands to produce weapons in Africa cheaper than in Europe. No word yet if they'll bite.
- Butch

- Freeman won Nakatomi's eye when he organized the assault on Kilimanjaro's spirit population and shamans, back in '70. Ruthless pursuit of goals gets that man giddy.
- SeaTac Sweetie

- Everyone turned their back on the Mass Driver when the Space Elevator started being constructed. Renraku has since bought out everyone else's investment for a fraction of the original value and is now the only AAA active in Nairobi. It launches for A-rated corporations that can't afford Ares or Evo rates. One hundred nuyen per kilo is simply the lowest rate around.
- Orbital DK

Renraku Africa has arcologies in every African nation, with the biggest naturally in Lagos. Of note to most shadowrunners is the arcology in Libreville. The Fraternité Arcology serves as a beachhead into the greater Congo region, used not only to process timber but to launch expeditions into the Congo Tribal Lands. With VITAS having depleted the population, the Congo offers vast swaths of unoccupied land, which Renraku hopes to convert into agricultural products, harvesting lumber in the process. The Congo is notoriously dangerous and unexplored since the Awakening, and Renraku is always hiring new guards to protect settlers.

- And here we have another potential hotspot between Wuxing, who are supporting piracy off the East African coast, and Renraku, who is heavily invested in Africa. Cheap versions of Renraku operating systems have started showing up on Wuxing-affiliated commlinks in Africa as well. For now, the "Friendly Corporation" isn't taking swings, but you can expect a lot of shadow talent sniffing around.
- Red Anya

RENRAKU NORTH AMERICA

Director: Orito Sasaki

This is the division that most of us are familiar with for obvious reasons. RNA took a massive hit with the loss of the Seattle Arcology back in '60, but that was almost twenty years ago, and they've recovered well. Renraku moved their North American headquarters to

Manhattan but has major facilities in a half dozen other cities, including Philadelphia, Montreal, and Santa Fe.

North America is the secondary source of Renraku's consumer products arm, and it also holds heavy investment in entertainment and education. Seattle was once a center of massive computer research, but this has almost entirely been relocated to Japan at this stage. Still, there are significant computer investments here in database management and the leasing of processing power to smaller corporations, Matrix security, and regional developers in the PCC, Sioux, and CAS who are always headhunting for promising candidates to send to the home office. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, is that North America is ground zero for Renraku's customer service industry, where they keep the Renraku brand name off of the hundreds of subsidiaries and the thousands of affiliates found in every corner of the continent.

- Renraku's been sneaking around Chicago, happy to be in Mitsuhama's shadow. There are plenty of people who don't want to deal with a Japanacorp, but small Renraku subsidiaries filled with Illinois natives don't carry that stigma. If you go up three levels of ownership, it turns out that they're just as Japanese, but most don't bother. These Renraku affiliates come in as white knights, Mitsuhama trundles away while muttering "Rats, foiled again!", and nobody realizes they've been duped until it's far too late.
- Bull

- Renraku has long been active in the Native American Nations. They were originally brought in for arms sales, but their appreciation for our culture and language won great respect. They have managed to reconstruct several tongues that we had thought forever lost, and continue to be integrated into our governments as advisors, economists, and more. Renraku recruits some of our best computer researchers and has recently begun to hire our shamans as well. Unlike the white man, Renraku honors their treaties.
- Mika

RENRAKU SOUTH AMERICA

Director: Maria Flores

With President Sasaki familiar with North America, Renraku America was split into two halves, creating the new Renraku South America division. This suited Nakatomi well, who has given Flores carte blanche to lay waste to NeoNET assets across the continent. NeoNET and Renraku have struggled over being the top dog here for years, but with Boston taking the lion's share of Villiers' attention and assets, Flores is striking here with laser-like precision. Interestingly, Amazonia has come calling, having lost a supporter in Horizon and run through the meat grinder against Aztlan forces during the Azt-Am War. It seems that while Aztechnology can simply replace bullets and machines that were lost in the war, breeding new Awakened takes time. Amazonian conscripts died in waves in the war until they got their hands on Aztech arms, and now Hualpa understands that the metahumans can be assets, not just liabilities.

- Or he's worried about an uprising. Renraku, quite literally, speaks the language of the metahumans in Amazonia and could bring them together as one big happy family. Then arm them and point them north while the shifters rebuild.
- Cosmo

- Running Renraku software on Aztechnology hardware's old hat down there, but Renraku's also behind pretty much every big telenovela or media star.
- Sunshine

- They've been showcasing some new drones down there. Turns out that the hypnotic powers of the Sangre del Diablo tree have no effect on robots. Flores has a lovely desk made out of SdD wood that she lights her cigars on.
- OrkCEO

- Wait. Doesn't cutting them down just spread the things?
- Chainmaker

- This is called either a sustainable yield or an ongoing revenue stream, depending on your degree.
- OrkCEO

- Keep in mind, Amazonia has always had a standard military, it's just that the technology they had largely dated to the late '30s and early '40s and was hopelessly outmoded against a foe as tech-savvy as Aztechnology (and Aztlan). With devastation hitting the ruling Awakened races, the lowly metahuman is both more important and more dangerous to the powers that be. Hualpa is having to make some concessions, giving them more land around Metropole for instance, in order to keep them from causing trouble. Moving new weapons to the metahuman forces could backfire on him spectacularly, but he doesn't have any other option due to the loss of Sirrurg.
- Frosty

CORPORATE CULTURE

Renraku has a very interesting take on corporate culture, based strongly on the teachings of Eternal CEO Inazo Aneki. In a stark contrast to other corps, such as Shiawase's relentless Japanese nature, Evo's "EvoCulture," or Horizon's "Everything must conform" steamroller style, Renraku blends two different flavors of culture together into one surprisingly effective mix. Remember that "Renraku" means communication, and

the corporation has always had a fascination with linguistics and, by extension, different cultures.

THE HOME OFFICE

The home office in Chiba, and the largest part of Renraku Asia, is based around Japanacorp 101. Executives are almost exclusively older Japanese men, attire and approaches are conservative, and traditional Japanese values are projected strongly. To get ahead in the highest corporate levels, it isn't enough to speak Japanese and know the correct way to bow, you need to have a Japanese soul and a dedication to sacrificing your life and happiness for the greater corporate good. Jobs are assumed to be lifelong commitments, and sleeping in coffin motels because you worked so much overtime that there are no trains to take you home is completely normal. Keep in mind that, in the general Japanacorp culture, few things are done without an endless source of meetings, ensuring that everyone is on board and in agreement with the general approach of business. Long work hours and a seemingly endless cascade of meetings result in several workers nodding off at inappropriate times. These slumberers are quietly ignored or, more often, gently woken up by casually brushing them while handing coffee around. Much effort is spent on saving face and being presentable; shaming the corporation must be avoided.

REGIONAL OFFICES

In contrast to other Japanacorps, Renraku changes cultures in each region or country. Oh, to be certain, the Regional Board of Directors is eighty percent staffed with old Japanese men who sport lifelong Renraku SINs, but they're prone to electing chief executives from local regions, and below the uppermost executive branch, Japanese falls away for local languages and culture. Where Aztechnology wants you to speak Aztlanner Spanish and convert to their religion, Renraku adapts to the local color, promoting it fully and never forcing their own culture down the local level. Renraku subsidiaries are always two or three layers removed from the actual Renraku name, but unlike Aztechnology, it's not hidden under an obscuring layer of holding companies and shells; they're proud of their corporate roots, but they put the local company's name first and foremost. This allows them to build a powerful brand loyalty, where attacks on Renraku aren't attacks against a distant corporate juggernaut but a company made up of people just like you, your friends, and your family. They speak your language, they use your currency, and they promote your kind to positions of power. It's one hell of a scam, and people buy in all over the world.

- We've seen the results of this Kabuki theatre in South America. People buy in to the Renraku Lifestyle, buying local products made by Renraku subsidiaries making products with a local flavor, especially food and fashion, promoting Renraku-owned media stars that are recruited from local populations, and more. They're able to tap into local pride and sell it back, wrapped in patriotism.
- Marcos

EVERYBODY'S FRIEND

Renraku has long been something of an odd duck in the Japanacorps. They're racist, sure, but they don't really push their values onto you like Shiawase or treat you like some meaningless cog like Mitsuhama. Instead, they move in, buy up local business, leave the same people in charge (but with a regional manager ultimately above them), and then just let those businesses keep doing what they were doing, only with a better support network that improves profits. They actively encourage local culture to thrive and have an actual philanthropic wing that, sure, is abused for good PR, but seems to do legit good work as well. In short, they're friendly and approachable, and this has made them the perfect go-between for decades. It seems that every corporate peace process is held in Renraku territory, and they honor their commitment to neutrality completely. This means that when two corporations want, or need, to work things out but aren't willing to go to the Z-O, they talk to Renraku, who sets up a meeting and makes sure that both sides are treated fairly. Renraku provides the location, produces neutral arbitrators if needed, and ensures that both participants are well treated and given plenty of time to present their issues, with a Renraku mediator helping the two sides come to an agreement. Renraku further operates the best corporate vacation spots and is more than happy to allow any corporation's citizens a chance to visit and enjoy their hospitality.

And, strangely, they never take advantage of this.

You never hear of Renraku using these opportunities to grab some scientist or executive while they're vulnerable, they never bribe guards for juicy data, and when they tell you that a room is secure and not being bugged ... it's actually secure and not being bugged. Just like they treat Matrix rental as sacrosanct and never observe the work going on there for their own use, so too are they unwilling to compromise a guest in their home. Everyone was worried that, under Nakatomi, this policy would change since the Business Butcher didn't earn that name by being nice, but he had taken advantage of this neutrality several times in the past and seems to genuinely value both it and the reputation it gives Renraku with other corporations. He's made no move to overturn it. Indeed, he personally presented his hated rival, Richard Villiers, with the head of an underling who recorded a vacationing NeoNET executive talking about a new product.

I've been wracking my brain to figure out what the angle is on this, but I'll be damned if I can figure it out.

- It is *Makoto*, or Sincerity, one of the Bushido Virtues.
- Baka Dabora

- It's also a survival tactic. Renraku used to be in Shiawase's pocket, after all, and has rarely had the heft of Mitsuhama. Their physical security has always been suspect, while their magical defenses were poor. When you're terrible at fighting, you learn to make friends to keep you safe. Perhaps you've noticed that their Matrix assets are quite happy to straight-up melt your brain while their guards will instead say "Halt!"? As for never spying on guests, you'd have to be an idiot to believe that.
- Icarus

This genial attitude spreads out in most levels of the corporation. Renraku workers are smiling and happy to work for the corporation, feeling true loyalty beyond getting a paycheck. When a worker is starting to feel run down, HR steps in and tries to find out what's wrong. While other corporations push mood-altering BTLs and medicines or tell the person they just have to learn to adapt, Renraku takes a view that everyone has a place—you just have to find out where you belong. In-house transfers are simple and common as workers try new things until they find one that they have a talent for or that they enjoy. They get jobs that they actually like doing and tend to stay there for long stretches, building up valuable experience that allows them to do the job better. Renraku, of course, pays a bit less than other employers, but most of their people are fine with that ... doing a job that you enjoy for less than a job you hate is something that a shocking number of people prefer.

- This is another part of Renraku's adaptive nature. They don't mold people to fit jobs, they find jobs to fit people. It might seem similar to how Horizon or Evo operates, but it's actually quite different. They never overwrite a person with corporate culture.
- Icarus

CONSERVATIVISM

Renraku plays it safe. They like stability, they like steady income over flashier boom-and-bust cycles, and they have strong ties with tradition, even if it's someone else's tradition that they're borrowing. This puts them in direct competition with Evo on a regular basis, pitting the old and established versus the new and innovative, and perhaps no corporation took the move from Japan to Russia as personally as Renraku did. It was a betrayal of the Japanacorp family, and allowing the Different to become the Normal clashed with everything Renraku stood for. Metahumans should be kept out of sight, women should be subservient, artificial lifeforms should know their place and serve humanity, and so on. Renraku's ties with assorted racial hate groups are kept quiet in public, but the shadows are well aware of it. Renraku certainly hires metahumans, even AIs, but they always feel better when "those people" have human handlers who can make certain they know their place. This policy is weaker in some regions, depending on the local culture, but a basic fear of the other is found worldwide, and Renraku knows how to tap into that like no one else. You can always count on Renraku being tied in with any local old-boys network and have deep roots that make it all but impossible to remove them entirely.

- Hell, Renraku's having a comeback in Seattle, thanks to Brackhaven and his ilk. You know, where a pyramidal kilometer full of tortured civilians and corporate malfeasance looms over downtown. For all we talk of progress, there's a large cut of the population that buys into this line of thinking, even if they never admit it.
- Bull

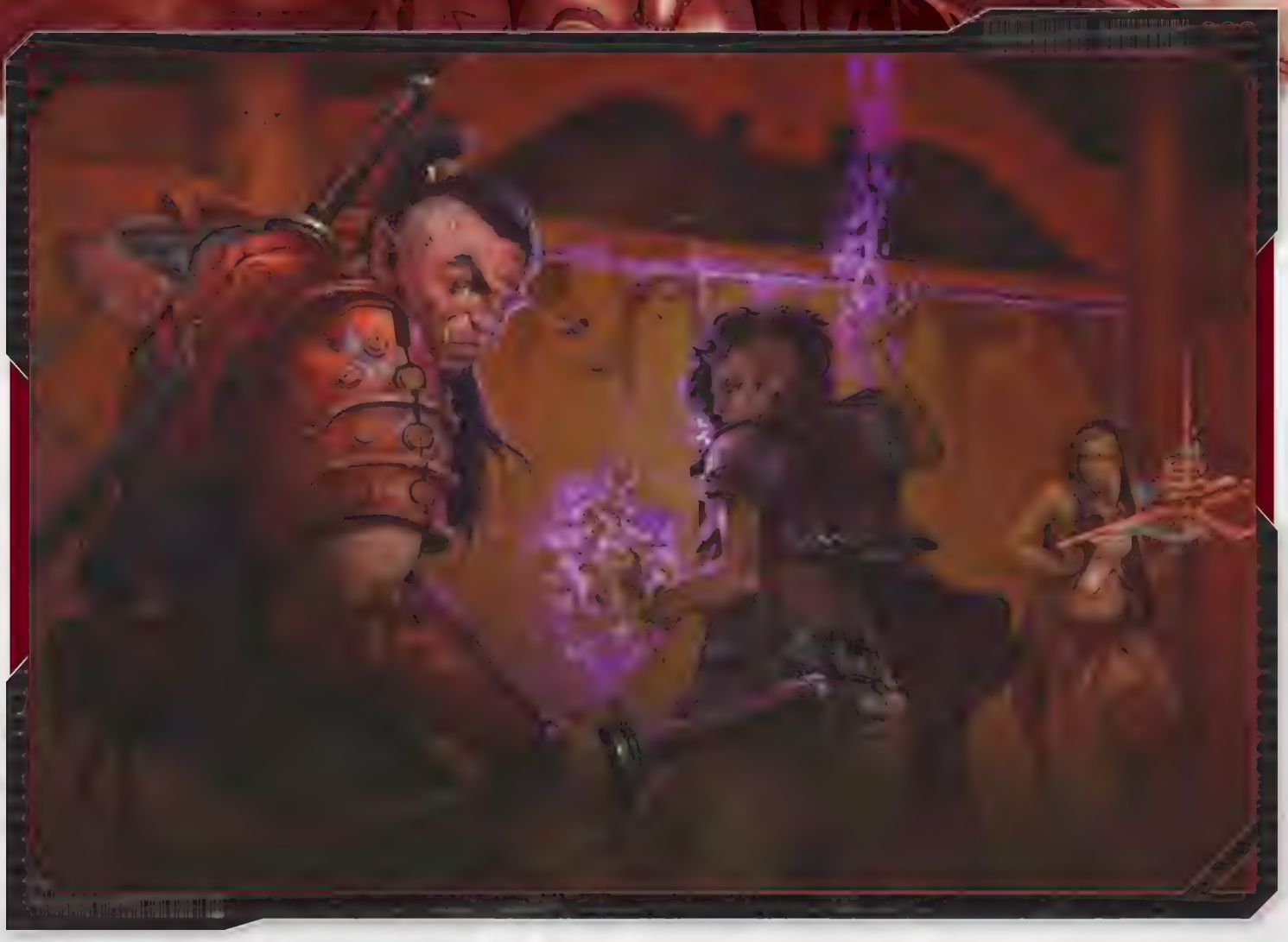
CORPORATE SAMURAI

We all know these guys, but as a refresher course, corporate samurai are high-end grunts who buy into that whole Bushido drek with all their heart. They tend to dress in security armor that's been tweaked to look like the samurai armor of days gone past and all of them carry a katana. Of course, they're also strapped with heavy modern artillery, are chromed up, and those fancy helmets cost more than a GMC Phoenix thanks to all the electronics shoved into it, so *caveat emptor* and all that.

- The standard corporate samurai is sporting wired reflexes, muscle replacement, and a smartgun link, all alphaware. Pretty basic street samurai loadout, but on the other side of the math from runners. They tend toward combat rifles and pistols rather than autofire pieces; it's a mark of pride that every bullet lands on target rather than risking civilian casualties by spray-and-pray.
- Hard Exit

- Those blades aren't just for show. Kenjutsu training is mandatory for all samurai, and those who want the job someday practice before getting elevated.
- Glitch

You might wonder why anyone's hot and heavy to join these up-jumped security guards, but the answer's actually pretty simple: prestige. As one of the core Japanacorps, Renraku has long made samurai culture a touchstone for their social structure, and the myth of the samurai is one that gets pushed—hard. Kids grow up watching the Sentai Samurai, teenagers read samurai comic books or pass around haiku love letters, and the stone-faced samurai of utter loyalty is a feature in every corporate soap opera. They're used as a noble example



of a proper corporate citizen, and when you steep in that for twenty years, you come out thinking that they're the best thing ever.

- The mentality isn't found just in Renraku-branded personnel but is also exported via Japanese media to all corners of the globe. There's a reason we have street samurai in the UCAS.
- Stone

- Remember, until Horizon came along, the biggest media forces were Mitsuhama, Ares, and Renraku, in that order. They had decades to influence the world, with little resistance.
- The Smiling Bandit

Every Renraku samurai gets a corporate SIN. As a symbol of being made a corporate citizen, every Renraku SINner gets a wakizashi on the day they gain such a status; when someone is granted a samurai rank as well, they're also given a katana and, thus, a full daisho. Ordinary citizens don't carry their sword around (obviously), but corporate samurai always carry both of theirs. There's a whole subset of rules about how they're worn, where they should be removed, how to set them aside, how to care for them, blah blah blah. The big one for most of you is this: Don't touch a corporate samurai's blades. They have the legal right to kill you on the spot for it. If it's an accident, you might get away with just a hand getting lopped off, but they have a moral obligation to uphold the honor of their blades.

- Standard corporate samurai blades are laser-polished and mass-produced, as you'd expect for something so common. They're good, but not great. Wakizashi, meanwhile, are just churned out of an assembly line, and most are just for posting on your wall.
- Hard Exit

- In contrast to the Red Samurai daisho. See below.
- Baka Dabora

Renraku Samurai are chosen for their loyalty, first and foremost. Oh, they're all prime physical specimens, they're security forces after all, but loyalty is baked into them from the first day of training. Ideally, they're taught to lay their life on the line for the corporation, that there

THE MORE YOU KNOW

Daisho: The pairing of the katana and wakizashi, often with the tanto dagger, as a unified set of weapons.

is no greater honor than dying to protect your superiors, and they must follow orders without question. The reality isn't quite so solid. Like any military, you have plenty of shining examples that are held up, but enough get through with low morality that you can generally find someone that can be bribed, charmed, seduced, or simply out-drunk if you're willing to put the legwork in. There's always someone's nephew who got in because of the family name, or an ambitious social climber who was more interested in the title than the job itself. Sniff around, but be careful; these guys can geek you legally.

Corporate samurai are generally only found at Renraku facilities and serve as a fast-response team, but they're sometimes leased out to subsidiaries. You know you've found an important project when you spot these guys on-site. You can also find them as bodyguards for important executives, and Renraku's military force features samurai in all elite units and for most officers. Watching them in Desert Wars is always a treat.

- The reason you don't see them in most subsidiaries is due to the lack of extraterritoriality. Being a corporate samurai gives you carte blanche to kill people on corporate property (but you're expected to make reparations if you accidentally snuff someone who didn't deserve it), but when you're following the laws of whatever country you're in, you can't invoke casual murder quite as easily. More than any other megacorp besides Aztechnology, Renraku relies on local law enforcement.
- Hard Exit

- Which explains the push for the Neo-PD.
- Haze

Membership as a corporate samurai is technically open to anyone, but the ranks are mostly male and mostly human. Female samurai are generally used as bodyguards rather than response team members, while ork samurai are never given anything but grunt jobs and work as line breakers, the first to be sent into battle where they invariably get chewed up. Leadership positions, of course, are just for humans. And elves. Because we're awesome.

THE RED SAMURAI

If the corporate samurai are the elite security force of Renraku, then the Red Samurai are the elite of the elite. They were originally a group of prettyboys dressed up in high ceremonial gear who didn't actually know how to use their props, but an early incident made Inazo Aneki rebuild them into a force of frightening skill. Unlike the Sioux Wildcats or Israeli Mossad, Red Samurai don't bother with stealth or covert ops; they are the mailed fist of Renraku, screaming the corporation's name as they cut a bloody swath through whatever they face. These are full-fledged shock-and-awe forces who arrive with great fanfare and never leave until the job's finished. I mentioned loyalty before and how a few bad eggs always slip through? That doesn't apply for these guys. Since leaving behind the days of being show ponies, not a single Red Samurai has willingly been extracted or found guilty of betraying their corporate masters. Loyalty is carved into their bones.

- Only fair, since their bones are mostly titanium and produced by in-house cyber-facilities.
- Slamm-0!

Loyalty isn't enough to move into the Red ranks, however. To get up on that level, you have to have ability. These guys are good. Maybe not the very best in the world—a side effect of having a thousand members—but they're on par with anyone at that uppermost level. Most Red Samurai are assigned as bodyguards for top executives, such as the board members of the home office, or regional CEOs, while the rest are used as top-level security at vital facilities. A few are kept organized in a military strike force; Seattle got to see this unit rolled out in person when the Arcology shut down, one of the handful of places this has ever happened. Outside of the once-a-decade deployment of this unit, you'll never find more than five Red Samurai together in a single location, and generally you only see one due to them being a bodyguard. Well, if you see one at all. They're quite rare.

- When they deployed to the SCIRE, it was the single largest gathering of Red Samurai in history. The casualty rate was staggering, and the actual death rate was as high as thirty percent during the first week of combat. Of the eight hundred who were deployed, less than five hundred made it back to Japan. You can access the list of the Noble Fallen here <link>. The swords of the fallen were passed to their children, and many of them have since taken the Red Oath themselves.
- Baka Dabora

While ordinary corporate samurai are elevated in a quarterly ceremony, Red Samurai are only elevated on the first day of the (Japanese) New Year. It's a huge ceremony done at Renraku World HQ, full of pomp and circumstance, with all of the biggest names in attendance in full formal kimono and livecast all over the world. It's a huge show, and everyone tunes in. Great time to hit a place, since everyone's attention will be off the job.

- This is the most emotional day in the lives of many of these stalwart warriors. Of course, it's also shameful to show such emotion in public. Those who can remain utterly impassive and whose voices betray no hint of pride in receiving this honor are destined for great things. They demonstrate that honor is stronger than any steel.
- Baka Dabora

Red Samurai wear even fancier armor than norm along with a personal family crest, or *mon*, over their heart. New promotions are given betaware upgrades and have cyber swapped out for bioware when possible, but those who've earned special distinction are given Deltaware. Their blades are also hand-made by Renraku swordsmiths, rather than being factory-made. This limits their number due to esoteric laws that only allow a master swordsmith to create fifty Katana a year. It goes without saying that these swords are priceless.

- A brief note. The daisho of the corporate samurai are classified as Shingendaito and are exactly seventy-five centimeters in length. The handcrafted blades of the Red Samurai are two centimeters shorter, showing that they're superior.
- Baka Dabora

- Wait. Shouldn't the bigger blade be better?
- Riot

- No, it has to be larger to compete with the superior blade of a master craftsman.
- Baka Dabora

While corporate samurai come in all shapes and colors, the Red Samurai are a harmonious lot, each a Japanese male human to a fault. There's been some pressure to modernize, allowing metahumans, women, or even (gasp!) non-Japanese membership, but the brotherhood of Red Samurai is locking arms over the matter. A few outsiders have earned a shot at the training academy, but all have washed out (or been forced out, or in a few cases, suicided) without graduation.

THE RED NINJA

This one's trickier as, officially, these guys don't exist. What data I could get was mostly secondhand instead of cold fact. According to these rumors, Renraku has always had a small army of ninjas, a sneaky underhand that operates in the shadows when the overt hand of the samurai isn't needed. Spies, saboteurs, and assassins, they're a black-ops team that mostly goes undercover and gathers intelligence but once in a while are broken out to handle some undercover mission. Some people talk about "cyber-ninjas," others about a cadre of physical adepts who mastered ancient magical arts, while others talk about mystics who can walk through walls, turn invisible, and use a "death touch" that kills anyone who walks one hundred steps after they make contact.

This, of course, is bullshit.

There's a covert arm of Renraku, of course, and these guys feed all of these rumors on a regular basis. The same media that details the glorious adventures of the samurai also paint ninjas as rare magical warriors (who, oddly, talk about honor and operate in the open) instead of what they really are: plain ol' boring human intelligence agents. Most "ninjas" are ordinary folks who are loyal to the corporation, keep an eye on what's going on in their building, and pass notes up the chain about what they've seen. They're office workers and datapushers whose entire existence is, by design, as mundane and overlooked as possible. They have social invisibility, quietly doing their job while never being noticed. Jake the janitor, Peggy the middle-aged office drone who never married but talks endlessly about her cats, Tom the office drone who's balding and portly and has heart issues as he's always on the verge of being let go for a younger sales agent—stock characters you find at every office. They don't know a blowdart from a blowjob, walk through doors instead of walls, and the only time they flip out is when they stub a toe on the dining room table. They are, to a person, painfully ordinary.

There is a small force of field agents who actually use the Red Ninja designation, but they're a fraction of the overall ninja corps. I'd say that there are a thousand "Peggy the ninja" types for every field agent, and I'm probably being generous. These guys are like the double-oh agents of British fame, a handful of assassins and problem solvers who get sent in to finish a job once gathered intel has been analyzed and a solution is planned. There are certainly some adepts in this group, while the rest are augmented with primarily bioware so as to not stand out. You can find social adepts and deckers in these ranks, but, again, they're rare.

- We've had reports of Red Ninja before, and those write-ups have been similar, but also different, than what Haze has shared. Honestly, we don't know what's true and what isn't with these guys, and the procedures might change every few years to keep people on their toes. Frustrating.
- Glitch

- Whether they're Red Ninja or not, the general in-house intel network is good at being quiet and observing, rather than acting. Subsidiaries may or may not have these ninjas as well, depending on how important they are and on how much control the home office is exerting.
- Hard Exit

RUNNING FOR RENRAKU

Traditionally, Renraku is one of the largest employers of shadowrunners. Their lack of extensive black ops agents (the Red Ninja, if they exist, notwithstanding)

and their general code of honor in terms of personally interacting with other corporations all but requires it. As you might expect from multilingual cultural chameleons, you generally won't know when Mr. Johnson is working for them. Mr. Johnson looks like a local, talks like a local, and offers local currency (nuyen takes some haggling) or corp scrip from an appropriate corporation including, on occasion, their own, in order to throw off the scent. Ares scrip in particular is one they enjoy a bit more than most, due to Ares being the other primary employer of shadowrunners and the simple fact that most shadowrunners can use it for ammo, explosives, and guns—you know, things we love.

- Your UCAS bias is showing, Haze. You see Ares most often due to your location. In most of Europe, it's usually Saeder-Krupp. In Scandanavia, it's NeoNET. In Japan, it's *always* nuyen.
- Traveler Jones

Once you've gotten a dozen or so successful runs under your belt, you may be approached by Mr. Saito, a Johnson who no longer hides his corporate affiliation. Mr. Saito will offer Renraku scrip, but also sweetens the deal with any number of bonuses—access to Renraku beta clinics, better cyberdecks, corporate retreats for downtime, and so on. You aren't house runners, not quite, but you're on call and on the short list to be brought into the fold. It's usually about three years from this level to being offered a spot as official Renraku operatives, complete with a corporate SIN, health insurance—the whole package.

Oh, and as a final notation, just because Renraku's hiring you, it doesn't mean that you won't be hitting Renraku assets. They enjoy live-testing new facilities, or older facilities with recent security upgrades, while low-level management sometimes hires teams to get dirt on their rivals for promotion, or blackmail material on their boss, in order to move up. You can't hire in-house for that kind of thing for obvious reasons, so they go outside the box.

RUNNING AGAINST RENRAKU

Renraku's own defenses are infamously uneven. If you're hitting a barely affiliated subsidiary, four shell companies away from the main brands, you're looking at rent-a-cops and local constabulary, topped off with some decent IC on Matrix assets and virtually no magical defense. When you get to more affiliated companies, things ramp up with actual security on-site, but still on the lighter side of things. These areas rarely have extra-territoriality, after all, so the guards are packing non-lethal gear and lighter armor, but will have drone backup, a security spider, and token magical support in the form of wards and a bound spirit or maybe an on-call magician who shows up in the astral. Matrix security at this stage will be tight, and unless you're a hotshot with a JackPoint account, you should assume that your control will be limited at best.

- I can verify this. You get spoiled against most corporations, with a decker running overwatch for the team—shutting off cameras, opening maglocks, suppressing alarms and giving you a heads up when security's inbound, that kind of thing. Renraku's Matrix assets are too strong for most deckers to handle like that. If you're lucky, you can get a five-minute window or so, but that's it.
- Stone

And then there's Renraku's own extraterritorial facilities. Renraku's always been fond of the arcology design for their branded compounds, giving them strong control of checkpoints, remote control of elevators and blast doors to channel invaders, high-threat-response teams, and probably a half-dozen Red Samurai around as bodyguards for the highest-level execs. Magical support is on-site, wards are everywhere, spirits come in all varieties, and, of course, the Matrix assets are just going to dominate you. Fortunately for us all, this level of facility is quite rare, as Renraku vastly prefers local integration and blending in over the somewhat worrisome "looming Japanacorp" visage that a Shiawase or MCT prefers. Aside from regional headquarters, you usually see one of these facilities per nation, with everything else being an easier, if less-rewarding, target. Renraku keeps research for its most valuable assets, such as Matrix, cyberware, bioware, and genetic/agricultural research in these facilities, but they're mostly used for logistics. Everything else is spun off into local facilities, including R&D and market research (which is then sent to the national Renraku advertising teams for kneading), and actual production of goods, industry, or farming. This modular design leaves them vulnerable to minor cuts, but almost entirely immune to a single catastrophic incident.

- Unless it happens in the arcology itself.
- Hard Exit

EXTRACTIONS

I wanted to take a moment to talk about extractions. Renraku loves them, of course, but it's complicated for the "friendly corp" to be seen with a recently grabbed researcher. Other corps don't care—these things are par for the course, and it isn't as if they'll not be snatching someone themselves later—but Renraku's prickly about their reputation, so they always offer a ransom, allowing the original corporation to buy the person back at a price that takes into account their perceived value, as well as whatever was spent on getting them in the first place. In addition, Mr. Saito will let fixers know that Renraku is always interested in acquiring extracted personnel from other corporations and they should

be approached for counter-offers. If you have an extraction that goes sideways, Renraku's always willing to take people off your hands, but they may well offer to ransom back home, a factor to keep in mind if you're doing some Hooding. Hooding! You poor, emotionally-invested sucker.

By always offering a ransom, Renraku manages to smooth over some hard feelings that the great game can produce. Just how valuable is this person's knowledge to you? If you're offered the chance to buy them back and you refuse, then Renraku has a powerful defense in the Corporate Court should you try to strike back at them. Renraku can also use this information to win someone over that wasn't voluntarily extracted. Playing a recording back where Renraku states plainly how much they value you, then having your old employer inform them that you aren't worth that, is a powerful psychological tool. These newly acquired assets are not only ready to work for the new boss, but they're also willing to put in all kinds of unpaid overtime in order to slap their old boss in the face.

MAKING MONEY

It's important to know how a business makes money. You need to learn what motivates someone, and once you know that, then you'll know how to make them dance to your tune. You might think that every corporation wants the same kind of profit, but you're wrong. Saeder-Krupp will take a loss to move Lofwyr's personal agenda forward. Shiawase will pass a risky move for the steady path, and Renraku? Renraku dances with data.

(DATA) CORE BUSINESS

Renraku Computer Systems. You'd be stunned to know how many people aren't aware of those last two words in the corp's name. Renraku was built on technology, specifically software, and that's as true today as forty years ago. Everything else, even the new service-side focus that's been rolled out these past few years, is secondary to software. Renraku programs it, Renraku uses it, Renraku sells it, and Renraku dominates it. NeoNET is flashier, thanks to their work in cyberdecks, but Renraku does the grunt work, with their systems accounting for over half the world's flops each nanosecond. Sure, they make cutting-edge semi-autonomous knowbots, cascading IC, and they were the first megacorp to create an AI (even if that didn't work out so well), but what brings them cash is the unsung grinding away of servers, moving data from one location to another, storing, sifting, and presenting on request the world's accumulated knowledge. There are dozens of AA-rated and hundreds of A-rated corporations who don't have enough processing power or data storage for themselves, so they rent extra oomph from Renraku, bringing in continuous revenue.

- Renraku usually pays some lip-service to hide their name under a level or two of cover, but "All-American Servers" or whatever ultimately uses Renraku computer systems. Surprisingly, they seem content to allow the use of this power without nabbing copies of the data for their own use. Renraku tends to take a long view instead of chasing quarterly profits, thinking the damage to their reputation if they stole intellectual property would be more harmful than whatever edge they'd gain.
- Kia

- Of course, that doesn't stop them from hiring deckers to go after the rest of the BigTen. Stealing ideas from A-rated corps isn't worth it, but the data from a Triple-A is juicy indeed and comes without threatening their database integrity.
- Pistons

An aspect of this is their anticipatory marketing, building a vast data form that showcases what someone is likely to buy, be it a product, service, or investment, directing them toward Renraku goodies that are similar enough that the customer will want to purchase them as well. At times, by using predictive data, they can even suggest things to a buyer before they know they want them, such as cold medicine or pregnancy supplies. Sure, all of the megas use their own versions of this kind of software, but none are as advanced as Renraku's, nor backed with so much processing power and raw data depth.

- I can verify this. Ever since Marionette and I hit up that spa a while back, we've each been getting invites to other vacations, product offers, and more. We went to another together, she treated her boyfriend to a third, and all of us have been picking up more Renraku products. They're well-reviewed by the community and have a good price.
- Turbo Bunny

There is, perhaps, no greater source of this raw power than their SIN registry database. Renraku runs the SIN registry of over one hundred and fifty countries that we know of, and the corp isn't going to be happy until they eventually control them all. They can literally decide who's illegally breathing, and as more data gets added to these registries, Renraku's knowledge grows exponentially. Need to reach every left-handed redhead in Maine? Renraku has their addresses on file and ready to go. They work with most governments to help with, or conduct outright, censuses, compiling huge swaths of information about households, income, and more.

SERVICES

The hot new trend in Renraku is an expansion of their service industry. They've always had a toe in that pool, focused mainly on datapushing, and they have never

dared to challenge Shiawase's supremecy in the FIRE fields (finance, insurance, and real estate), instead focusing on distribution, retail, and wholesale industries. Their database strength allows for in-time delivery of products, stocking shelves just as demand strikes, directing consumer trends, and insuring a constant churn of income. If you ever go to a Matrix mall and see how many stores are effectively showing the same products, you're seeing Renraku at work. They don't own every little mom-and-pop apparel store, nor every hot trendy chain; what they own are the warehouses that those stores shop from, filling their racks (and selling them racks to put the product on!) with no-risk sales. If a line tanks and some stores go under, it doesn't hurt Renraku one bit. They got their slice when the retailer bought garments in the first place, and often owned the factories where those garments were made for a double-dip of profit. There's also office chairs, desks, and tortoise stations for modern office workers, caskets for funeral homes, soda for fountain drinks, and oh, the vending machines.

What's new is the move from support services to front services, such as hair styling, landscaping, house painting, plumbing, auto repair, and much, much more. These smaller businesses are under umbrella operations and never bear the Renraku name, but they send their profits up the chain all the same. One current series uses Matrix-based commlink apps that allow for those who buy in to the service to be called in as subcontractors (but never actual employees). Each app seems to be the lone product of a small firm, but most are just false fronts for Renraku and the rest are renting Renraku servers to run the affair. So, when you use UltraSitter to grab a babysitter on short demand, you're slipping Renraku a little money.

- Renraku has the most employees of any megacorp, with over three million corporate citizens. Once you add non-citizen employees and subsidiaries, this number grows to close to eighty million. If you take into account the overall support network and related businesses that draw on Renraku money for jobs, they indirectly employ around a *billion* people.
- Mr. Bonds

The hot new thing, of course, is the Neo-PD, Renraku's entry into the security market. While they've had security firms before that provided corporate security and dabbled in urban contracts, the Neo-PD is a full-court press into civic policing, a distant fourth to Lone Star, Knight Errant, and Eagle Security, but rising quickly in the public eye. In a world of militarized police blazing away with automatic weapons and full body armor, the fresh-faced NPD officer stands out like a unicorn. Sharply dressed, friendly, always smiling, and using the latest in smart weapons and non-lethal drones to operate as bloodlessly as possible, the Neo-PD fully embraces Renraku's computing power to prevent crimes before they happen, or to ruthlessly track criminals electronically, picking them up casually instead of engaging in risky high-speed chases or shootouts. Snapping up a BTL dealer when he goes out for a snack, or simply standing in a recharge station as a getaway car runs out of juice, where they smile, wave, and hold up a pair of handcuffs ... it's slick marketing. The white gloves that they always wear are turning into a symbol, and there's growing legislative pressure about "maverick cops" whose stray bullets wound the general populace. NPD is still small, but give them time.

- The Neo-PD is in intense negotiations in the Nordic countries. The ultimate goal is to take over Neo-Tokyo, whose independent police force has played the Japanacorps against one another for decades.
- Thorn

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

In addition to the SIN registry that's their baby, Renraku also offers any number of other governmental services, from bureaucratic streamlining and data processing to accounting and taxation, run smoothly by their massive, and hyper-secure, Matrix systems. They also offer physical assets, such as GridGuide nodes for traffic management, or uniforms for city workers. They've now added metahuman workers to their arsenal, operating hiring centers that can generate temp workers or provide warm bodies to any civic position when new jobs need filling, ensuring skilled workers that integrate effortlessly into the pre-existing culture. This is managed due to ...

EDUCATION

Renraku is the single largest educator in the world, famous for its linguistic skills, but excellent in other fields as well. While there's an investment in Renraku's private school system, mirroring the private schools of Japan and Shiawase, for corporate citizens, the bigger market is Matrix-based education. This side of the business doesn't make much profit and has actually lost money more often than not, but controlling what the youths of the world learn allows Renraku to have a subtle influence on what kinds of people they grow into, from the cultural icons that advertise products on short ads before lessons load, to morality that happens to fall in line with Renraku's samurai ethos, to simply ensuring that Japanese remains the international language of business, despite the world's (formerly) largest megacorporation using German. When the world retreated from religion in general, and Catholicism in specific, thanks to Pope John Paul IV coming out so strongly against the Awakening, the small school systems that the Church maintained all across the world's most poverty-stricken areas were left without funding. Renraku swept in, first financially,

then with personnel, and lastly with a worldwide integrated educational Matrix that allowed students in the slums of Rio de Janeiro, New Delhi, or Gulfport to all have access to the kinds of education you'd find in the best schools in wealthier districts.

- "Swept" is a bit strong. The Pope's New Years' Mass of 2012 was two decades before Renraku even formed. Still, they did flow into those areas and gave them a kind of hope that hadn't been seen in a generation. That kind of thing breeds loyalty, and loyalty breeds repeat business.
- Icarus

- Ares has contracts with many school districts in the UCAS, having taken over failing education systems in many areas, rebuilding them with drink machines in the lunchrooms, advertising in the textbooks, and constant media presence. Shiawase runs many private schools. Renraku's always been heavily invested at the university level and in prep schools and has had a cradle-to-the-grave education system in their arcologies. As more Ares schools fail, Renraku's all too happy to move in and take over. The CAS, which did away with compulsory education in many states, is now seeing the result of that decision and has been drawing on them heavily to come in and restart entire school systems.
- The Smiling Bandit

ENTERTAINMENT

Traditionally, Renraku comes in third in the entertainment businesses behind Mitsuhama at the top and Ares as number two. The upward mobility of Horizon, which has snapped up several Los Angeles studios, has turned everything sideways and Renraku's entertainment divisions have been working hard to use the chaos to advance their own products. As you might expect, the simsense programs have been using Renraku's Babylon Matrix network for distribution, but the trideo remains a constant income source. In particular is the "machine" system, where they focus heavily on live-action children and teen-focused shows, whose better stars are then pushed into a musical side-career, developing from teen stars to mature artists (or at least provide burnout content for the sleazy tabloid programs that Renraku produces), carried along by multi-layered marketing approaches and Renraku brand managers. Shoppazulu, the Renraku shopping network, directs the fans of these teen stars toward merchandise featuring their stars, crafted at Renraku facilities. Purchases are announced on Renraku's social networks, and high scores of brand loyalty on those networks then lead to discounts on branded merchandise, creating a self-sustaining loop. When a new star burns out, the network is there to ensure that a replacement is ready, clearing out old merchandise for the hot new thing without missing a beat. Renraku talent scouts are always looking for new talent to feed into the machine, turning dancers, singers, actors, and the marginally-talented-but-attractive into commodities. Once in a blue moon, they even create art!

- Renraku's Confederate Broadcasting Channel's been up and around Boston 24/7, reporting on the situation. You'd expect them to be taking swings at NeoNET, but they've been fairly neutral on who, exactly, is responsible for the lockdown. They've been murderously covering each failure of Knight Errant in the area, however.
- Sunshine

- Not a surprise. They sell a lot of arms to the CAS, and with Knight Errant rubbing elbows in Atlanta, they'd like to make sure that Damien Knight stays on his side of the border. It plays well with Chinese warlords and, as a happy bonus, makes security providers start looking around for options right as the Neo-PD enters a growth phase. Have I mentioned how much respect I have for the long con?
- Haze

Beyond the flesh-and-blood stars, Renraku's had decades of strength from virtual stars, animated characters that are known worldwide, VR idols, and emerging AI talent, Renraku is well aware of the appeal of characters that never age and can be placed into any situations or dressed in local culture. Baka Bunny has entertained three generations of kids while being translated into well over a hundred languages, is equally well-known in London, L.A., Toronto, and Tokyo, and is doodled by children in Singapore and Sao Paulo. Even Sydney, well-known rabbit-haters, fell under the Bunny's spell, and children are growing up thinking of bunnies as adorable cartoon heroes instead of an invasive pest that has resisted eradication efforts there for years.

- Renraku's always hungry for artists, and their Matrix toolkit for young animators is sold at a break-even price in order to keep training up the next generation. The traditional sources from Asia have always been welcome, but there's a burgeoning industry forming in Nairobi, and Amazonia's metahuman population has produced some truly amazing talent. Renraku's assorted entertainment divisions always include a cartoon and animation department, used for features, trideo, and developing adorable animated mascots for products and services created by other arms of the megacorporation.
- Kia

The heavy investment in Japan and North America, by way of Los Angeles, Vancouver, and Nashville, is easily seen but don't forget Renraku's worldwide focus. They have stars ranging from Korea's Boys Generation to dozens of leading actors and actresses in Bollywood's sim-cinema to the year-round performance of Azanian opera.

- The Cape Town Opera is amazing, but they never allow their shows to be recorded. A few pirated recordings have been leaked, thanks to modern cybernetics, but the act is punishable by up to twenty years of prison and forfeiture of *all* your assets. I have no idea why this law is so draconian. The official word is that the opera is a performing art that can only be appreciated while it's being performed, but considering that everything's scripted and the performances are held multiple times a year, it doesn't make sense. Still, the ensemble cast, known as "The Voice of the Nation," is hugely popular and pours proceeds into smaller performing groups all across the African continent, so it's a small price to pay. If you can wrangle tickets, keeping in mind that these shows are sold out a year in advance, make sure to shut down your electronics when you go in.
- 2XL

PRODUCTS

Renraku has loads of products, of course, but a few bear special mention.

CONSUMER GOODS

Interestingly, Renraku has very few worldwide brands. Oh, to be certain, certain media stars are marketed across the globe, but for the most part, Renraku believes in producing local goods, using their supply chain to save money and undercut local competitors, rather than shoving their own products into local markets. They adopt local cultures and products, make them for less, and reap the rewards.

FASHION

One of Renraku's high-profit areas is fashion. Interestingly, the big strength here is that Renraku is a wholesale empire; they rarely bother with their own clothing stores, knowing all too well the high turnover rate there, but instead act as a wholesaler, providing the clothes to independent retailers. Every notice how every store in the mall sells the same basic things? They all buy from Renraku wholesalers, who churn out whatever the latest trend is (often one of their own designs), and when those clothiers go under, Renraku's already made their profit and is preparing the next wave. They have their own designer labels, of course, but for the most part, they simply latch on to local clothing producers, buy them out, then sell under that brand while saving money on the supply chain for superior profit. Renraku has even quietly surpassed Aztechnology in the field of cheap mass-produced clothing, as their African factories undercut Aztlan by a significant margin.

- Where most corporations will try to get you to wear the latest from Paris, Milan, or New York, Renraku tells people that their native dress is better than those high-falutin' fancy duds, and the local brands are all familiar. Sure, they're all foreign-owned once you do a bit of research, but most people don't care. They grew up wearing Levi's and don't think twice about the ultimate owner.
- Kane

CYBERNETICS

Always a high-ranking member of the cyber-clique, Renraku's been snapping up rival corporate cybertech for a few years now; as the Nanopocalypse undercut consumer confidence in chrome, and bioware grew more dependable and affordable, cybernetics have been seen more and more as dead-end technology. This has allowed Renraku to pick up rival labs at massive discounts, a move that continues to leave most stock investors in head-scratching confusion. Sure, they're getting assets at a fraction of their value, but that value is presumed to continue to decrease, making it a puzzling purchase. The Business Butcher isn't known for making poor investments, but it might be that his age, and his own cybernetic needs, are causing him to play a bad hand here.

MOTOR VEHICLES

Never a major player in this field, Renraku's only wholly owned subsidiary in this category was Isuzu Motors, but it has long had investments in Toyota (currently a seven percent stake), Hyundai (23.2 percent), the Dongfeng Motor Corporation (forty-nine percent), and Ford (11.4 percent). They were content, as Renraku so often is, to let these subsidiaries do as they wished while simply enjoying the profits, but this has started to change with the purchase of GridGuide tech from Mitsuhama. While it's true that MCT still owns the rights to the technology, and Renraku has to pay a small fee for each vehicle that it's installed into, the ongoing service contracts offset that investment, while the information gathered from it is priceless. Renraku is looking to move to a majority position in Hyundai, as well as picking up Mahindra & Mahindra in India lock, stock, and barrel. M&M is the largest motorcycle producer in the world while also being a top tractor producer, which interacts with Renraku's agricultural strengths. Integrating GridGuide into bikes, let alone tractors, seems a bit odd, but when you look at how many Tuktuks there are and how Renraku can use this to direct traffic to their tourist areas, it starts to make a bit of sense. As usual, Renraku's all about subtle nudges, making your choices for you while you never catch on.

AGRICULTURE

Renraku's third wheel status comes up again, this time behind Aztechnology and Shiawase, but they're a major player in the international food market. Rice is the obvious crop, thanks to the Renraku dominance of Asia and a significant chunk of Japan, but they're big in both Africa and Australia. Renraku food is huge in Amazonia, where their own farm-

ing is heavily curtailed by the Awakened rainforest. What you might not expect is that Renraku is the world's leading supplier of soybeans, the core ingredient for soy-whatever. They don't do anything with it themselves, instead farming it and then selling the raw form to other corporations who turn it into any one of a thousand food products. This helps them avoid all the cost of research, marketing, and design, while also steering clear of notoriously fickle food fads. They simply have a solid, reliable production base that insures a steady income. They're also the world's largest producers of palm oil, a food additive that you ignore but is listed in most of what you eat, with plantations in Indonesia almost four times the size of Belgium. Add their additional plantations in Malaysia, and Renraku singlehandedly produces just over half of the world's sustainable palm oil. They're also market leaders in the production of bamboo, coffee, tea, and bottled water.

- You have no idea how huge that last bit is. Aztechnology scooped up Nestlé years ago but needed some cash to handle the debt, so it sold off the bottling subsidiaries, like Vittel, Nestea, and Nescafé. As potable water became an endangered species, these same companies became more profitable than the bigger brands that Aztechnology had hung on to. There's still some bad blood over that, decades down the line.
- Cosmo

- Soybeans in China and the CAS are big business, but the market that sets executive eyes a-sparkling is in Amazonia. Renraku's in talks with them to buy the former territory of the Bom Futuro plantation, just over six thousand square kilometers of fields that were dedicated solely to the production of soybeans back in pre-Amazonian Brazil. Normally, this would be a non-starter, but the fact is that the Azt-Am War put a horrific drain on the Awakened of Amazonia. You can replace tanks, guns, and metahumans without too much work, but shapeshifters are rare and breed slowly, and dracoforms even more so. This means that Amazonia is having to rely on its metahuman population, letting them expand their urban areas over the anger of the Awakened population, and seek income by selling off some assets in order to build some sort of military force separate from the organic front line that they'd previously enjoyed. As noted above, Renraku is viciously dismantling NeoNET investments in the region, leaving them as the main game in town.
- Marcos

- If you ever cared to look, Renraku has a strong focus on equatorial investments, which also happen to be prime growing areas. You never think of them in the same line as Aztechnology or Shiawase, since they don't slap their name on foodstuffs, but being number three in such a huge market is a big deal.
- Icarus

- Renraku does make one thing with their soybeans, I should point out: soy sauce. They absolutely dominate the market.
- Nephrine

- They're also the number one player in both coffee and tea, the former being a strength in the Kingdom of Hawai'i, while the latter draws from both China and India.
- Balladeer

As usual, Renraku co-opts local brands rather than introduce their own, seamlessly weaving them into local ad spots on their assorted media outlets. Renraku tends to use more homespun, family-oriented marketing, invoking the memories of traditional family time, rather than the "hot new taste sensation!" marketing of, say, Aztechnology. The exceptions to this, of course, are their kid-aimed products, which are always bright, loud, and sugary. Oh, and in case you didn't know, Renraku has a hand in the dental industry. Because of course they do.

OTHER MAJOR SECTORS

TOURISM

Renraku has a respect for local culture and is well-known for speaking the local language, so it's not a stretch to see them move in and offer to run tourism for nations. Their success in the London Underground won them the Seattle Underground contract, for instance, and they were brought on board in Tír Taingire when it loosened the borders and transformed its economy while encouraging visitation. On top of this, they are heavily invested in every state in the CAS. Smile, show you around, compliment you, ensure you have a great time, and then encourage you to return with discounts (reducing staggering profit to just ordinary profitability), leaving you thanking them for taking your cash. These con artists are *amazing*.

Renraku has also partnered with companies in several Caribbean islands, the Philippines, and the Kingdom of Hawai'i, all focused on tropical vacations. Renraku owns several cruise lines and is invested in regional airports, allowing them to see profit just on people going somewhat near paradise. Combine this expertise in the relaxation field with Renraku's reputation as neutral territory for AAA corps who want to settle things shy of bringing in the Corporate Court, and you'll find some highly restrictive resorts filled with a who's who of execs from all of the Big Ten, sipping beverages from coconut shells while resting on white sand beaches.

- Interesting tidbit: The Sea Dragon has never attacked a Renraku-owned vessel at sea.
- Icarus

SAEDER-KRUPP

For the first few weeks he had his new cyberlegs, Dauger kept them completely covered while he was on the job so that he wouldn't get too distracted staring at them. He loved them. They looked fast even when he wasn't moving. It wasn't just the slick, twisted design, though that helped. It was that they somehow looked like they had a slight vibration to them, like they were always in blurry motion, and your eyes could not catch up to them. It was hypnotic. He didn't know how the SpIn engineers did it, but he was glad he had it.

After a few weeks, when he felt he could handle not staring at them, he rigged up some tight shorts that allowed modesty where necessary but exposed most of his legs. It was completely awesome. He looked like a superhero. He didn't need the exercise, but he took up jogging, just so he could be out. Zeeburg was not the most scenic part Amsterdam, but with the ever-present toxic sludge, that was true for most of the sprawl. But pretty scenery was not the birthright of people like him, so he trotted through the cracked concrete, the rusted rebar, and the never-dry puddles and grinned broadly at whatever poor happened to be out when he passed.

The lack of people and the general deteriorated nature of buildings in Zeeburg meant he picked up the tail within minutes. There were two of them taking turns, one on a vehicle that was too big to be a scooter, too small to be a motorcycle, and another moving fast on foot without visible augmentations—probably an adept. If there were more crowds in Zeeburg in the evening, maybe they could have blended in. But traffic was light, and Dauger was observant.

He knew the streets, knew which dilapidated buildings he could cut through, and he stayed ahead of the pursuit. He saw how the scootercycle was trying to herd him down an alley, he knew the adept would be trying to cut him off on the other side, and he knew his legs were faster than they knew. He could hit full speed in an instant, so he did, flashing over cracked pavement, watching the end of the alley move toward him.

Then his legs suddenly stopped moving, and the only thing coming toward his face was the surface of the alley.

He probably blacked out. It sure seemed like he did. Not for long, because blood was still running down his face when he came to. He tried to push himself up on his knees, but he got no response from his legs. They were locked.

"Stay down," a voice said, and Dauger looked up to see the adept, a lean human in grey sweats, standing over him. She had a device that was little more than a big red button in her hand.

"Ah, Spinrad. So much focus on looks, so little on security." She tossed the button from hand to hand. "If I were a decker, I could probably have all sorts of fun with your legs. But I'm not. I just have this nice signal to shut 'em down. Nice, isn't it? Got it from the guy who hired me. Maybe you know him—Hans Brackhaus."

Dauger's core temperature dropped ten degrees. "I'm not in that league. He doesn't have to worry about me. I'm just working to get by, okay?"

"No, it's not okay. Not really. Thought that would be clear by now. I'm not against you working, but you and anyone else you know better be careful who you work for. I know Spinrad has all sorts of delusions of grandeur, but don't get caught up in them. Don't forget where you are. Don't forget that the continent is ours."

Danger spoke before he could think. "It is? News to me."

"Then I'm happy I could be the one to tell you." She smiled at his legs, like so many other people, but on her it wasn't nice. "Think about it as you drag yourself home."

SAEDER-KRUPP

Corporate Slogan: "One Step Ahead"
Corporate Court Ranking (2078): #2
Corporate Status: Private Corporation
World Headquarters: Neu-Essen, Allied German States
President: Lofwyr
Notable Subsidiaries: Advanced Frontier Cybernetics (Cyberware), Ætherlink (Matrix), Amalgamated Technologies and Telecommunications (Matrix/Electronics/Drones), American Broadcasting Service (Media), AN Meridian (Resources), Angelic Entertainment (Media), Arianespace (Aerospace), AV of Ukraine (Armament/Military Vehicles), Awakened World Research (Magical Research), BAE Systems (Aerospace), Barytech (Heavy Industry), BMW (Automotive), Bremer Vulkan (Shipyard), Centurion (Security), Commerzbank (Finance), Deutsche Erdölgesellschaft (Resources), Diehl Defence (Armament), Eastern Financial (Finance), Elemental Service (Magical Service), Eurocar Consortium (Automotive), Fatima Petrochemicals (Resources), Fokker-Orlikov (Aerospace), Hermes Matrix Services (Matrix), Hochtief (Construction), Intel-XS (Computech), Kinesys Heavy Industries (Resources), Konglomerat Przemysłowo-Wydobywczy (Heavy Industry/Resources), Krupp-Gruppe (Heavy Industry), Lothian-Vaea PLC (Finance), Lunar Mining (Resources), Maser Industrial Electronics (Robotics), Messerschmitt-Kawasaki (Aerospace/Vehicles/Heavy Industry), Micronetics (Biotechnology/Genetics), Morgen-Tek GmbH (Industrial Electronics), Nippon Credit and Trust (Finance), Norsk Hydro (Chemicals/Heavy Industry), Old World Airways (Airline), Onotari Arms (Small Arms), Orbital Dynamix (Aerospace/Satellites), Phillips (Electronics), Rosneft (Resources), Ruhr-Nuklear (Energy), S-K Aerospace (Aerospace), S-K-Puma (Fashion), S-Kea (Furniture), SaederLine (Fashion), Saurer-Rieter (Vehicles/Heavy Industry), Schweizer Bankenverein (Finance), Siemens (Cyberware/Heavy Indsutry/Industrial Electronics), Siemens-Nixdorf (Electronics), Spellweavers Consortium (Magical Goods), Symington Corporation (Transportation), The Arcanum (Arcane Service), Thyssen Aqua Service (Water Supplier), Transnational Communications (Media), Trans-Oceanic-Mining (Resources), Triox (Chemicals), Undine Processing (Chemicals), Volkswagen (Automotive), Volvox Industrial Chemicals (Chemicals), Vulcan Systems (Energy), Willamette Compustat Corporation (Matrix/Software)
Important Shares: AG Chemie (5%), ESUS (10%), German Treuhand (15%), Lusiada (4%)

POSTED BY: HEISENBERG
Based on my recent update on the dragon's corporate inquisition in *Bloody Business* and deep insight in the history and organization of Saeder-Krupp (due to being a former intelligence employee of S-K Prime), the holy trinity of JackPoint asked me to give you an updated rundown on the boss's empire.

TALES OF A DRAGON EMPIRE

RISE OF THE GIANT

The roots of one of the biggest of the AAA megacorporations reach back to the **Bayerische Motoren Werke** or **BMW**, a German automotive and engine company founded in the early nineteenth century. Even before the Golden Age of the Big Seven, BMW was on the brink of what we would call an AA corporation today. A well-established but conservative multinational with several overseas subsidiaries and manufacturing sites, its true rise only began when **Michel Beloit**, a power-hungry senior BMW executive, assumed control of the company. Under Beloit's vision and leadership, BMW diversified and expanded beyond limousines and motorcycles. With good ties to what is nowadays AG Chemie and the Frankfurt Bank Association, he exploited the economic and political difficulties in Europe to the company's advantage, putting BMW on the fast track for megacorporate ascension with well-selected mergers and takeovers

- Together with AG Chemie (formed 2001) and FBA, BMW used their influence with the German government to negotiate the Passauer Verträge (Passau Contracts), which granted exterritoriality to German multinationals in 2011, long before the BRA.
- Ecotope

When Beloit died (of unnatural causes, if you believe rumors) his wife and neo-corporate socialite **Mina Graff-Beloit** assumed control of the company, purging anyone among the management who opposed her. Despite her ruthless attitude, she fared reasonably well as CEO for a couple of years until the boss made his move to steal the corporation from under her.

- BMW's takeover history was a violent one. Beloit used mercenaries to kill the Quandt family clan, who owned a significant portion of the controlling shares. That gave Michel the opportunity to acquire what he needed in the aftermath of the "family disaster" and putting the blame on Keruba (Renraku) forces who were waging war with BMW at the time. He then used his voting power to engineer a palace coup, ousting his former superiors and putting himself in charge. When Michel bit the dust (whether by the claw of Lofwyr or the hand of his beloved wife), Mina followed Michel's lead, purging the board through backstabbing, blackmail, and scandals (and murder if necessary). Still, she was no match for a great dragon when he revealed his true (feral) nature to the board and made perfectly clear what would happen should someone oppose him. I actually believe Mina could have had a bright future within Saeder-Krupp if she had not dared oppose him.
- Fianchetto

As dragons tend to do, **Lofwyr** had played a carefully planned long-term game, stacking the deck in his favor by acquiring shares for a quarter of a century via shell companies and private investors until he finally made his move in 2037.

A lot of people have speculated why Lofwyr chose that year. I don't think it was coincidence that he assumed control of BMW five years before the global signing of the Business Recognition Accords, which were already in the first stages of legal negotiations with governments at that time. The BRA made megacorporate dominion official in most countries and made the Big Seven more powerful than any single nation on the planet.

Lofwyr did not just want to own a corporation to make money. He wanted to have a legal entity of power (i.e., a corporate state with its own rights, laws, military, and espionage resources) with a decentralized territory (i.e., global sites defined by exterritoriality) and loyal subjects (hundreds of thousands if not millions of employees), with him as their undisputed leader. So what he basically created was an empire. And he made sure that it would be difficult to take it from him. That was the sole reason, why—after seizing BMW—he spent two years, from 2038 to 2040, restructuring all subsidiaries and branches under Saeder-Krupp (which had been formed from Thyssen-Krupp and Saeder Munitions, both already acquired by Beloit in the '20s), a private megacorporation fully owned by himself. So it was ready when the BRA was finally signed.

- I think Heisenberg is right. Seizing a country (by force or by pulling strings in the background) would have been by far more difficult. Also, as a great dragon, Lofwyr would have never answered to a board of directors and let humans judge (or even challenge) his undertakings. Like many of Lofwyr's grand schemes, this was a win-win on so many levels that is very hard for a human brain to comprehend. While a merger of two or more megacorporations is a huge undertaking, the way the dragon reshaped BMW into Saeder-Krupp was groundbreaking, if not insane. The economic and legal changes were implemented within just two years and engineered by Lofwyr himself.
- Mr. Bonds

- The strategy paper authored by Lofwyr was published in 2070 on the thirty-year anniversary of S-K for study purposes and economic simulations. I recommend the read, although the manuscript is several thousand pages long. It is outright scary what a dragon mind is able to process.
- Kay St. Irregular

Since the '40s, Saeder-Krupp has thrived, dominating the corporate landscape as first among equals. The Euro Wars and subsequent economic conquest of Europe, Russia, (Northern) Africa, and the Middle East cemented the corporation's reign in extended Europe. Globally, S-K focused on monopolizing certain industries and getting access to natural resources, oil, gas, or the public infrastructure. As S-K became the biggest employer in these countries and had the power to switch the local Matrix, energy, and water supply on and off, the megacorp gained more and more influence in several regions to the point that certain governments are mere S-K puppets. To further strengthen his grip, Lofwyr also built a network of powerful financial corporations around the globe to issue loans to these countries, making them even more dependent on his corp.

Lofwyr was also one of the biggest factors in the formation of the **New European Economic Community** (NEEC). He was the one who profited the most from the lift of national restrictions. So Saeder-Krupp prospered and became the biggest and most influential megacorp in the world, as it didn't have to deal with all these internal struggles so many other megas had to face. Even

with Crash 2.0, S-K came up on top, scoring some wins. Lofwyr simply "informed" the European governments that he would switch every Matrix grid S-K provides, as they all had a secret failsafe system. The boss could easily shut down the European Matrix before it could be completely destroyed by the Crash worm. Later he could safely switch the Matrix back on with just minimal losses of data and metahuman lives (compared the the rest of the world).

- On the one side, everyone was glad they weren't hit as hard as, for example, North America, but on the other hand they saw what power the dragon possessed and that Lofwyr saw the governments as subordinates.
- Red Anya

As tensions in the world were rising in the early '70s, the boss made a bold move. In 2072, it became clear that his corp owned every single property four kilometers around the Saeder-Krupp Main Arcology in Essen. and the dragon transformed it, based on the BRA and Passau Contracts, into a full exterritorial zone named **Neu-Essen** (New Essen). He began to entrench himself in his personal city within a city, forming the perfect corporate utopia.

ATTACK ON A TITAN

It was only a year later, with the beginning of the dragon civil war, that the master of chess had to move to a defensive stance, and Saeder-Krupp started struggling. There was no single reason why it happened, which is probably why even a great dragon failed to see it. It all started with Dunkelzahn's bequest of the loremaster title Lofwyr, forcing him to intervene and negotiate between the different dragon factions and their views on metahumans. In turn Lofwyr was "rewarded" by some of his fellow great dragons by having them take shots at his empire, targeting assets all over the world. In addition, the boss had to deal with and settle an eon-long clutch vendetta with his brother **Alamais**, culminating with the battle of GeMiTo in which he (and S-K) burned millions of euros in resources for military gear (drones, military vehicles, S-K military personnel) and mercenary contracts (like the one with MET2K), stretching S-K resources thinner than ever.

While Lofwyr was involved in troubleshooting the dragon conflict, control of the corporation was handed to trusted individuals, who, unfortunately, were only metahuman and not able to fully micro-manage like a great dragon. Work and duties were delegated down, but many managers in the Krupp empire were overstrained. This led to further losses of assets and business. While Lofwyr allocated more and more money from his corporation that was originally budgeted for stabilizing weaker corps or for long-term investments, the remaining managers were forced to take loans to keep their plans moving forward. And these plans, some made years ago, were the only ones they had, as S-K lacks a high-level decision process to come up with new ones when the boss is gone. Everybody was hoping Lofwyr would come back and save Saeder-Krupp from its paralyzed state. Out of fear they could get dragged into the conflict, several S-K employees left the company; some retired, while others, who had lost trust in Lofwyr, finally turned their back on him, often taking viable assets with them.

- Rolf Bremen managed to attract some of S-K's military and intelligence personal for his new employment at Spinrad; Saied Bey, Lofwyr's henchman in the Middle East, switched sides to Global Sandstorm; and Marlene Carstairs, former head of S-K Asia, retired, though she kept her S-K citizenship.
- Icarus

With the first sign of weakness, the sharks began to circle. While Lofwyr was focused on the dragon conflict, all his enemies tried their luck in attacking the titan. One of the most prominent of these attacks was the bomb attack on the Ætherlink HQ in Hamburg on June, 26th 2074, killing **Wernher Julius Davids** and his wife. The headquarters was hit so hard, the corp was forced to move to Dortmund and was effectively knocked out for the next few months. While the police could not find the ones who were responsible, the list of subjects is long, ranging from various neo-anarchist and terrorist groups to Ares, NeoNET, the DeMeKo, and even including some dragons like Hestaby or Ghostwalker. There are also rumors that the attack was planned and executed by a special unit of the Bundeswehr (German Armed Forces).

It's not one hundred percent clear if that last rumor has any real legs. But users of the German shadow Matrix found evidence about a conspiracy within the German government rooting back to the early days of the Allied German States. The Founding Fathers and Mothers of the AGS foresaw a future where corporations became more powerful than the state. So they put some money, personnel, and resources aside to counter such a development. If such a plan exists, those behind it might believe the time has come to act.

Later that year Germany got a new chancellor, and to everyone's surprise the old corporate-friendly administration wasn't reelected. To Saeder-Krupp's (and especially Lofwyr's) displeasure, the conservative candidate **Anikka Beloit** won, the last remaining heir to the Beloit legacy. Her slogan is "Meeting corporations on eye level," and as you would expect from someone with that view, she cut off the privileged access S-K had to the government in the past. She is no idiot and certainly not a blunt corporate hater that wants to abolish all corporations. She seems to want a model similar to Japan, where the corporations and the government work hand in hand. Unfortunately, that conflicts with Lofwyr's plans.

- In September this year, she faces the next election, and due to her handling of the CFD crisis she will probably get reelected.
- Kay St. Irregular

With the conclusion of the dragon conflict, the boss handed the loremaster title over to Celedyr, mainly to get rid of the responsibility. Thanks to his spin doctors, Lofwyr came out as the good guy, as he stopped Alamais, his brood, and other rogue dragons and drakes from terrorizing the people. Saeder-Krupp also promised to compensate any losses and damages caused by any dragon, which cost him huge sums of nuyen. This brought him back lost sympathy so he could finally return to his office and refocus on his empire.

Just as Lofwyr started restructuring his megacorp a second time, CFD hit the world. While corporate intelligence and security were able to pick up head cases very early, they did not know what kind of phenomenon they were dealing with until it started spreading. To clean the corporation from this menace, the **Innenrevision**, S-K's internal affairs office, was vested with additional resources and power to handle the problem as the "Sacrosanct Corporate Inquisition" by the grace of the great dragon. As head cases are deviants who threaten the control and integrity of the system that is S-K (head cases don't know how to function properly, and a cog that starts making its own decisions endangers the whole machine), they need to be dealt with. Nonetheless the appearance of CFD forced S-K to shut down its whole nanofabrication branch.

All of those events combined were too much, even for a giant like Saeder-Krupp. The overall S-K empire is still intact and ubiquitous, but factories, or even whole subsidiaries, were closed, and others were merged. Combined with the shutdown of nanofabrication, S-K suffered a significant drop of productivity. And so, what nobody ever thought could happen, happened—the giant fell. I mean, not like NeoNET is falling right now, or Fuchi did in the past, but enough to lose the title of biggest megacorp in the world and be passed by Mitsuhama. I guess that was a shock for everybody working for S-K, and I can imagine the only thing everybody is thinking about is getting back on top of the corporate food chain.

ONE STEP AHEAD AGAIN

In the past, its huge productivity gave S-K a significant advantage over its competitors. But these times won't come back soon. The boss had to close subsidiaries like GIAT Industries or Heavy Metal, merging Dresdner Bank with Commerzbank to stabilize the latter, and significantly shift his general workforce around. This process left S-K in a defensive position, which gave competitors chances to enter markets once dominated by S-K. I guess everybody at S-K was happy that the Megacorporate Audit came just in time to distract the lesser corps and give S-K time to breathe. With the audit behind them and the tensions in the corporate world rising due to several power shifts, the NEEC boils. Up until recently the Eurocorps consisted of about three factions, S-K (with Lusiada), the "Euroquartet" (FBA, HKB, NeoNET/Erika/Transys, and Z-IC) and the Southern Alliance under the influence of Aztechnology (Esprit-Dassault, Sol Media and Spinrad, though Sol and Spinrad don't like each other) with the rest being either neutral or with divided loyalties. Now, these alliances are beginning to crumble and may fall apart. One of these new alliances is between NeoNET and S-K. It's very fragile and still quite young.

- The AAAs now all stick together like old pals who haven't seen each other in years, but pick up right where they left off. Heartwarming.
- Slamm-0!

Many say this new alliance was made by the two to fend off rebellious AA and A corporations and strengthen the Corporate Court, but in my opinion the boss has a different idea. Remember, the main problem of S-K is the lack of productivity. And how do you raise productivity as a megacorporation? Either you create more high-quality products for lower prices from your existing portfolio (which for now is not possible), or you expand your corporation within said portfolio and enter new markets, or you expand into completely new business areas. My guess is that Lofwyr plans to take over as many NeoNET assets as possible. One sign of that is the relocation of **António Ortega**, a former NeoNET employee, to S-K's Main Arcology in Neu-Essen, where he now leads a special task group called **"Fall Magenta"** ("Case Magenta") of unknown purpose.

But it seems that S-K wants to expand on a broader scale. To achieve this, Lofwyr allocated funds for new innovations and research, acquisition, and formation of new companies, and hiring new personnel (and by hiring I mean hiring and "hiring") to bring the corporation back on top. Lofwyr and S-K have to act fast and show the world their might. While the NEEC AAs are now dealing with themselves, the NEEC countries, under the impact of CFD, began to further organize and demand more accountability from the corps. It should be no surprise that this coalition is lead by Chancellor Beloit.

Also, Lofwyr will not forget Mitsuhama, who surpassed them and continuously acted against S-K for a sustained period. Lofwyr will do everything to undermine MCT's output to help S-K reclaim the top spot. So, prepare yourself for industrial sabotage delaying or stopping research and product-design projects, while also reducing overall sales.

Saeder-Krupp stands in front of a monumental task, where shadowrunners aren't enough. Lucky for them, they got some help. Just recently **Isabelle Corbeau**

switched sides from Shiawase and joined S-K, and to my surprise, they are also granting some head cases from outside the corp citizenship. Interesting times to come.

THE S-K MACROCOSM

Before we jump into the organization of Saeder-Krupp, let's look at the major fields of S-K operations. Due to its recent reorganization, power within Saeder-Krupp shifted. Once-important and powerful subsidiaries were pushed into the background, with others taking their place. Of course, that is not obvious for Joe Average, as S-K utilizes a complex structure and does so quite intentionally. But let's begin with the basics.

GENERAL STRUCTURE

As I said above, S-K's structure is quite complex. Its main purpose is to cover the true size of Lofwyr's empire, even from his own subordinates. It is organized in several tiers—generally two, but often you may add a third or even a fourth tier. The first tier consists of a core group of corporations bearing the Saeder-Krupp name. These are obviously the Krupp Group and its divisions, but also corps such as S-K Aerospace and the fashion labels SaederLine and S-K-Puma. These corporations are one hundred percent owned by Saeder-Krupp or possess Saeder-Krupp extraterritorial rights. This group forms an organizational skeleton that connects a vast number of affiliated multinationals (often with extraterritorial rights of their own), nationals, and even smaller corps. This layer of the first tier contains other corporations officially aligned with S-K, like Ætherlink, BMW, Hochtief, and so on. They can (to some degree) operate on their own and are sometimes even independent entities with their own extraterritorial rights. Some of them may not shout their S-K affiliation from the rooftops, but it's not hard to trace ownership

The second tier of corporations forms the bulk of the Saeder-Krupp macrocosm. Most Saeder-Krupp employees work in this tier. Typically, these second-tier firms receive financial injections and directives from Saeder-Krupp or an intermediary corp, but only the highest-ranking executives in these firms are aware of their affiliation with Saeder-Krupp. Here you find corporations like ABS, Nippon Credit and Trust, Siemens, or Willamette Compustat. Some of them are big enough to have AA status on their own.

- They have that status for now. It might change with some second-tier corps due to the Megacorporate Audit, as some of them may lose their extraterritoriality. Others might never get the chance to get it in the first place.
- Kia

- The box at the beginning of this file includes corporations from the first and second tiers. There are many rumors about various corps that are secretly owned by Lofwyr, like the fashion label Rheingold, the small arms manufacturer Heckler & Koch, and one or more PPG members.
- Cosmo

As I mentioned earlier, there is also third and fourth tiers. These are corporations that don't even know they belong to S-K in any official way, and they don't get treated like the second-tier corps. They are owned by either a network of shell companies or second-tier corps, while neither own more than fifty percent, so they look independent at first glance. The forth tier contains small companies that belong neither directly nor indirectly to S-K, but depend so much on them (via loans, or because S-K is their main subcontractor) that they could be seen as additional subsidiaries. These final tiers I like to call the Greater S-K Macrocosm, which also include corporate allies not affiliated with Saeder-Krupp in any official way (besides S-K or an affiliated corp owning a minor share). These alliances may shift over time or may just be used by Lofwyr to counter certain enemies.

This complex web of corporations, shareholding, shell companies, and hidden subsidiaries was set up by Lofwyr to fend off corporate predators. This tree design was able to protect Saeder-Krupp in the crisis to a high degree, as only the lowest branches of the tree were vulnerable to attacks. This is why just a few S-K subsidiaries where closed or forced into insolvency, unlike other dragon-affiliated corps. Lofwyr and S-K are using the remaining structure to repair the damage suffered, as the megacorp is still well positioned in several industries.

- One thing bugged me for a long time. When Mina died in 2063 on board Zurich Orbital, where she withdrew after her resignation from BMW—what happened to her BMW shares?
- Snopes

- Ah, the Golden Ticket discussion. Ownership of BMW is still S-K's express lane to the Corporate Court. Mina got rid of her shares before relocating to Z-O, but not to the dragon. The majority of the shares are owned by Saeder-Krupp (as a legal entity), and Lofwyr used his resources to extend his shares over the past decades, shielding BMW from any takeover attempt. To whom Mina sold her shares is unknown, but you can be sure that her daughter either owns them (in secret) by now, or is using anything she can (including the resources of her own Munich-based conglomerate, now led by her husband) to acquire them.
- Heisenberg

CORE BUSINESS

HEAVY INDUSTRY AND CONSTRUCTION

Though even the core businesses of Saeder-Krupp had a hard time while Lofwyr was absent, the corp is moving to regain lost market shares. Despite these troubles, S-K is still the largest producer of steel and composites in the world. Besides selling these materials to hundreds of corporations, they also use them to fabricate things like heavy machinery, power plant and factory components, engines, or every other technical equipment you can think of. The first name that came to your mind, when you think of S-K's heavy industry division is, of course, the **Krupp-Gruppe** (Krupp Group). Even on its own, the Krupp Group would be an impressive AA, but as a part of Saeder-Krupp, it is the true heart of Lofwyr's empire. It includes of the Chemicals (Industrial and Consumer Chemicals), Manufacturing (Heavy Industry), Munitions (Armament), Robotics (Industrial Robots) and Specialist Engineering (Heavy Equipment/Mining) branches. Every branch is even further diversified, having several divisions and subsidiaries on their own. So, for example, **Krupp Manufacturing** has the following divisions: *Materials* (steel production, metals), *Automotive* (industrial and utility vehicles), *Marine Systems* (submarines, aircraft carriers), *Technologies* (prefabricated parts, elevators, hydraulic equipment) and *Nanofabrication*, though the last one's production was put on hold due to CFD. Its headquarters are in Essen (bordering Neu-Essen), and factories of the Krupp Group can be found around the world. But S-K owns several other heavy industry subsidiaries of various sizes. The second biggest would be the France-based **Barytech**, which is also active in nearly all French-speaking countries, or the smaller **Konglomerat Przemysłowo-Wydobywczy**, the biggest producer of coal, steel, and chemicals in Poland.

- It's hard to see the effects of heavy industry in everyday life—besides the pollution, of course. But put simply, modern life would not be possible without it. I mean, how many of our products rely on steel, or metals like copper or aluminum, or any kind of alloy? Saeder-Krupp provides all these and also builds the machinery and the factories so others could provide it for you, too.
- Cosmo

S-K is also one of the biggest construction corporations in the world. It provides everything from planning to materials and machinery, the actual construction work, and the maintenance and facility management afterwards. With its various construction companies, S-K is capable of constructing everything from simple houses and skyscrapers to streets and highways, industrial and power plants, full city districts, and arcologies of all sizes. S-K's vast network of construction companies en-

sures that at least one big company is available on every continent, though it also owns several smaller companies that just do business in one particular area or even a single sprawl. Companies that you might have heard of are **Bouygues** (which built the SOX wall in 2010) and the giant **Hochtief**, which is famous for their arcologies around Europe and elsewhere.

- If you need even more reference for their expertise, just look on what they did to Neu-Essen.
- Red Anya

MANUFACTURING AND ENGINEERING

Saeder-Krupp's manufacturing divisions design and produce vehicles ranging from monowheel ground craft and drones to large suborbital-capable planes, space shuttles, naval ships, and even parts for the construction of buildings, satellites, and orbital stations. Additionally, Saeder-Krupp manufactures land-based weapons ranging from small arms to heavy artillery, as well as aerospace, naval, and orbital-defense systems and even nuclear weapons. A considerable amount of these weapons goes directly to Saeder-Krupp's corporate military and security forces and never sees the open market. Lofwyr's armament subsidiaries often cooperate with other branches and subsidiaries of his empire, as well as S-K–associated corporations like Heckler&Koch, which has licensed the production of its firearms to the **Krupp Arms** division of **Krupp Munitions**.

- H&K has been rumored to be part of the S-K macrocosm for a long time. Its biggest shareholders are the Commerzbank and its current manager, Quirin Laplasse, who worked at Krupp Munitions before he switched to H&K. But from the outside it's still an independent, A-level corp.
- Mr. Bonds

To aid its manufacturing division, Saeder-Krupp maintains the space station **Himmelsschmiede** ("Sky Forge"), where it produces electronics, microtronics, and other high-quality products under zero-G conditions. S-K used to employ nanoforges and nanotech-aided construction procedures that have led to numerous breakthroughs in the areas of miniaturization, optimization, and re-invention of conventional applications in the past. But CFD changed everything, and these branches had to be shut down.

- Fun fact: Since the take over of Volkswagen in 2068, Saeder-Krupp now owns six automobile brands: Audi, BMW, Messerschmitt-Kawasaki, Mini, Rolls Royce, and Volkswagen. Seven when you include Eurocar, though the two other members of the consortium, Ferrari and Porsche, are still independent.
- Turbo Bunny
- They've even more when you include all the trucks, bus, utility and industrial vehicle manufacturers.
- Clockwork

CHEMICAL PRODUCTION AND PROCESSING

Saeder-Krupp's own heavy industry, manufacturing, and construction operations need a steady supply of industrial chemicals. So to not be fully dependent on external suppliers, Lofwyr has several chemical plants across his empire, whose main client is the megacorp itself. So with some notable exceptions, they produce and process chemicals for industrial applications rather than consumer products, unlike its competitors Z-IC, ETC, or Komatsu. The output of these subsidiaries includes chemicals for the pharmaceutical, textile, and automotive industries; petrochemical products, metallo- and bio-plastics and composites (including smart materials) for the cybertechnology, construction, and electronics industries; specialty coatings and other performance products such as car paints; and polymers such as leather chemicals, varnishes, pigments, and adhesives. There are also plants for specialized chemicals used for mining and extraction of resources, machine cleaning, as well as for various steel and metal production processes.

- Again, not a very glamorous branch, but without it, S-K would be a hugely less productive. That's why his enemies often target S-K's chemical production or supply lines, and that's why it is the very first sector Lofwyr reconstructed when he returned to office.
- Cosmo

RESOURCES AND RECYCLING

The other business segment that is famous for S-K is its mining operations. To provide raw materials and fuel for its manufacturing and heavy industry operations, the megacorp has long focused on mining, extracting, and refining biotic and abiotic resources (such as oil and minerals). But many resources in conventionally exploited regions have become increasingly depleted, and other areas aren't easily accessible anymore (like Central Africa or Amazonia). So Saeder-Krupp has been venturing into more exotic fields, including lunar, asteroid, and underwater mining and drilling to lay its hands on resources before its competitors can. S-K is also one of the main oil drilling companies, with operations stretching from the Gulf of Atzlan to extractions underneath the Arctic. They're also battling for the last oil fields along the African coast and in the Middle East. It also should be noted that S-K is big in mining Awakened materials with subsidiary like **Kinesys Heavy Industry**.

S-K had to invest huge sums of nuyen to undertake and maintain these mining operations. In order to keep

their mining operations despite the budget changes after the crisis, S-K decided to sell more resources to other corporations instead of keeping them for themselves. To compensate, it tried to implement even more efficient recycling methods to regain precious raw materials. Saeder-Krupp also owns a high number of modern industrial recycling patents, including ones emitting less pollution and CO2 into the air.

- Too bad there is a difference between owning the patents and actually implementing the technology.
- Ecotope

In S-K strongholds like the Rhine-Ruhr-Megaplex or big factory complexes, a perfect circular flow economy was set up decades ago (with all its consequences like resource thefts and Mafia involvement), but now the company wants to expand it to the entire corporate empire. But that demands even more control on sites that, in several cases, S-K recently lost. Local henchmen and managers have to get more involved in local politics and local competitors they might have ignored some years ago.

INFRASTRUCTURE

S-K remains strong in public infrastructure. Right behind Shiawase Atomics and Geatronics, it's the third biggest energy provider worldwide, and number one in Europe, where it's generally hard for non-European corps to find their niche, as the market is already densely packed with local providers like Hydrolux Engineering, France Énergie, OMV, and S-K. But S-K is also active in the Middle East, North Africa, Australia, and to some extend in North and South America. Its main energy corporations are **Ruhr-Nuklear** and **Vulcan Systems**, though it also owns several smaller, local companies. They are extracting energy from gas, oil, and coal, as some countries still uses these methods, but the megacorp's energy subsidiaries also operate nuclear fission and fusion reactors, geothermal and hydroelectric plants, and land-based and orbiting solar collectors. S-K also fabricates batteries and energy cells, such as the storage batteries that power most commlinks and decks, as well as larger versions of electric and hybrid cars. Of course, the power plants often produce thermal energy, which is also used to heat homes. They can also send you an expert to help insulate your house, so you don't waste too much energy.

- S-K has superior reactor technology over Shiawase and Gaeatronics, so while these two operate several nuclear power plants, some of their reactors are actually build by Ruhr-Nuklear, Siemens, or Messerschmitt-Kawasaki.
- Clockwork

Besides energy, S-K also supplies several cities and sprawls with fresh water, either using normal groundwater, desalination plants, or drilling for deep underground water reservoirs. They also clean sewage to make it reusable. Due to technologies introduced by Proteus or Shiawase Envirotech, previously uncleanable (industrial) waste water can now be turned back into fresh water using genetically modified bacteria, nanotech, and/or a cocktail of different chemicals.

- There were even some nanoscrubbers that could remove radiation particles in radiated sewage, but usage came to a stop recently. Hope they can bring them back quick—this technology is desperately needed in some areas.
- Butch

FINANCE

Saeder-Krupp has plenty of financial holdings, though you may not know it as the affiliates regularly deny any affiliation. S-K owns several banks around the world, including at least one big multinational on every continent. Some years ago S-K was, after Zürich-Orbital, the biggest financial corp in the world, followed by Hildebrandt-Kleinford-Bernal, Wuxing, Malaysian International Bank, and the Frankfurt Bank Association (S-K's longtime rival). But things changed with the Crash 2.0. Wuxing nearly doubled its financial power with the takeover of MIB (putting them on par with S-K), while the FBA acquisitions made them surpass HKB. The recent struggles were the crucial factor for S-K losing the pole position to Wuxing, as it burned a lot of money and merged some assets to stabilize its financial sector. But even as a second-place financial corp, S-K has huge influence over several other corporations and even whole countries. You can find S-K affiliated banks and financial corps at the big stock exchange hotspots—Zürich, Frankfurt, London, Hong Kong, Moscow, Neo-Tokyo, New York—and numerous smaller ones.

MATRIX AND COMPUTER SYSTEMS

S-K is very active in providing Matrix access and runs several grids across the world, though their strongest spots are Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, and the Indian sub-continent. In the past there were a countless number of Matrix providers under the S-K umbrella. But with the arrival of NeoNET and Horizon, Lofwyr decided to unify them under one single corporation: **Ætherlink**, with its headquarters in Hamburg, AGS (which was a clear statement toward Erika and Transys Neuronet). But after the attacks in 2074, the headquarters were moved to the former Ruhr-Datafax Arcology in Dortmund. After the old CEO was killed, the corporation decided to introduce a dual leadership. The new heads of the company are Miguel Fernández Cordona (former head of Ætherlink Spain) and Doris Floricic (former hacker by the name Yori from Berlin). Cordona

deals with everything business related, while Floricic is also the head of security, supervising the training of S-K security spiders and demiGODs.

In addition to Ætherlink, S-K also owns several companies that provide services such as Matrix security, hosting, news tickers, software programming, data archives, data processing and analysis, data consulting, as well as host and grid design and architecture. On the hardware side, they build business computer terminals, nexus mainframes, and various sorts of computer chips that are used in commlinks, cyberdecks, or even industrial machinery. They also provide the popular Matrix encyclopedia Ætherpedia.

But beneath that all sits S-K Prime, Lofwyr's intelligence service, searching the Matrix for everything that might be useful or a threat. They use several methods, including modified hardware, transmissions interceptions, and intelligence-gathering worms that autonomously scour the Matrix for certain keyword combinations.

MAGICAL RESEARCH

S-K's magical divisions are not often in the spotlight of public interest, but they nonetheless are an important part of the megacorp. They lead in various fields of thaumaturgical development. **Spellweavers Consortium** and **Awakened World Research** create and license spell formulae, metamagical techniques, and enchanting processes, while **Elemental Service** provides things like geomancy, magical training, security, and so on. The most valuable person in S-K's magical division is by far Prof. Dr. Makram Zharan. Officially the chief research officer of Spellweavers Consortium, he actually is the one pulling the strings. He has contacts in every one of S-K's magical hotspots (such as Dortmund, Karlsruhe, Heidelberg, and Prague) and supervises all research projects. In addition, he is responsible for all communication between S-K and the dragon Schwartzkopf. One of his most trusted confidants is Dr. Irina Belgardt, who is in charge of all S-K operations in Karlsruhe and helps Schwartzkopf's interests in the German magical hotspots.

OTHER AREAS

MEDIA

A niche segment of S-K is its media divisions. They own some trid networks and studios here and there, but that's nothing compared to big players like Horizon, Mitsuhama, or Regency. The time where S-K could challenge these was shortly after the Crash 2.0, when Ætherlink acquired a nine-percent share of the German DeMeKo, after it had to abandon its own Matrix-providing infrastructure. But as this was always a marriage of convenience; everybody was happy when S-K had to sell its shares to an escrow holder after the dragon conflict. Now there are just some news services, and trid, music, and simsense studios that often customize their products for S-K corporate citizens, while also being available to the public. Their products are generally okay but don't have a big impact.

- I heard some rumors that, after the failed takeover attempt by Regency, Angelic Entertainment (the shell corporation for every S-K activity in California Free State) is now interested in buying Amalgamated Studios. If this happens, it would certainly boost S-K's media portfolio and give them a bigger presence in Horizon's hometown.
- Sunshine

CONSUMER GOODS AND SERVICE

S-K was never really eager to make huge amounts of products for the private consumer market, but they still offer some products for ordinary people. They provide not world-shaking but quite solid consumer electronics, furniture, home appliance, household drones as well as cyber-, bio- and geneware (offered by **Advanced Frontier Cybernetics**, **Siemens**, and **Micronetics**). Fashion companies like **SaederLine** and **S-K-Puma** sell your everyday clothes, sports- and smart-ware (like self-heating winter clothes), while **Rheingold**, which is rumored to be part of the S-K Macrocosm, produces haute couture. To some extent, S-K is also involved in public transportation. In S-K strongholds like the Rhine-Ruhr-Megaplex, the corp controls nearly all transportation providers, while car-sharing services offered by nearly all of S-K's automotive companies can be found in every good-sized sprawl around the world. With Düsseldorf-based **Old World Airways**, they also have a very renowned airline, and with the **Symington Corporation** they control VIA Rail and UCAS Rail, the two dominant railroad companies on the West Coast. The latest addition to Saeder-Krupp was **Centurion**, a police service and private military company hybrid. As a private police corporation, they offer a full and an "enhanced" service, where they only provide the special units, like CSI or Awakened investigative teams, while the city or municipality provides the basic police forces. On the other side, they offer a military policing service for unstable ares like the Balkans or Africa, like the UN peacekeepers once did.

- Well it's odd, but from time to time I like to use stuff from Schwartzkopf Cosmetics. I was shocked when I was told that the owner Henkel is actually part of Krupp Chemicals. I should have been suspicious when Vandenhoek made commercials for them.
- Kat o' NineTales

AGRICULTURE

Is Saeder-Krupp active in agriculture? Well, yes and no. I know you heard a lot about a shadow war between Shiawase and S-K, but when you look at the bare figures

you find that S-K has little to no actual food production activities, especially when compared to Shiawase. Sure, there are some big farming complexes in Southeast Asia, Africa, or South America, but these don't produce goods for the open market. S-K grows and produces luxury items like exotic fruits, coffee beans, cocoa, or high-quality natural meat for their own citizens.

Lofwyr saw no use in going into the agriculture business, as Europe and the surrounding countries are already densely packed with power players like AG Chemie, Meridional, Z-IC, and others. They produce more than enough food, and Europe is one of the biggest food exporters. But Lofwyr is always looking for ways to control things, so they work in his ways. And this control can also be indirectly. What S-K does is provide things like fertilizer (due to its mining operations, S-K has access to huge amounts of phosphor) or pesticides. Their construction and manufacturing divisions also provide heavy machinery for food-processing factories or agriculture vehicles and equipment, including fully automatized greenhouses and specialized micro-pollination drones. Orbital Dynamix provides detailed agricultural data via satellite scans, S-K's network of water suppliers and power plants bring fresh water and energy to the farmers and factories, and its banks give them loans to buy everything they need.

- Of course, they are not uncontested in any of theses areas. AGC and Z-IC provide more fertilizers and pesticides, Renault-Fiat's CNH is the world leader in agricultural vehicles and equipment, and there are various banks giving loans to farmers. But there are very few corporations that offer more than one of these services and, with just a few exceptions, only some megacorps can offer all of these services.
- Mr. Bonds

Because of that, several agriculture corps and countless small farmers, especially in Asia, depend on Saeder-Krupp and are part of the Greater S-K Macrocosm. And when you include that into your calculation, S-K has enough agricultural power to challenge a corporation like Shiawase.

- I think the dragon changed his mind and wants to better establish Saeder-Krupp as an agricorp. S-K recently made some deals with Yakashima to further undermine Shiawase's agricultural power. And let's not forget the defection of Isabelle Corbeau.
- Baka Dabora

SPACE ASSETS

Saeder-Krupp has various astronautic subsidiaries, starting with sub-orbital and semi-ballistic planes manufacturers, and ranging to launch-service providers, space-vessel manufacturers, and satellite-network operators. The roots of S-K's Space program go back to the old European Space Agency and associated industries, which was privatized in 2025, sold to BMW, and restructured when Lofwyr took over BMW. On the manufacturing side you have **BAE Systems**, **Messerschmitt-Kawasaki**, and **S-K Aerospace** (formed from BMW Aerospace in the '40s) producing launch vehicles, satellites, habitats, and other space components. Then you have **Arianespace**, which operates S-K's launch sites (Baikonur in Turkestan, Kourou in French Guiana, Overberg in Azania) and **Orbital Dynamix**, which trains S-K's astronauts, acts as mission control, and operates S-K's satellite network and space stations.

- Nobody knows where S-K's mission control actually resides. There is an old ESA one in Darmstadt that S-K still uses, but from its Matrix output you could guess that it doesn't handle all of S-K's space operations.
- Orbital DK

S-K maintains a huge satellite network, consisting of several spysats made for imagery intelligence or intercepting transmissions, but also civil comsats, GPS (they absorbed the old European Galileo global navigation satellite system), and geoscansats, making geological scans for navsofts, research, or other purposes (like agriculture). In low earth orbit you can find the **Himmelsschmiede** (Sky Forge) orbital factory, while on the dark side of the moon you will find the **Sigmund Jähn Lunar Station** (named after the first German in space, but often just nicknamed "Far Side," wrongly translated by non-German-speakers as "Fernseit") operated by **Lunar Mining** and OD. Besides these two stations, S-K also has some Mars exploration and asteroid mining operations.

In 2069 S-K received the contract to build the Skyhook space elevator. OD started looking for a fitting counterweight asteroid and finally brought one back in early 2073. Construction on the ground moved quickly, and the lift was partly operational in 2074, though the S-K crisis prevented further progress of the project. So the asteroid with the partly finished lift is kept in earth orbit, like OD would do with a normal mining asteroid.

- While S-K is behind schedule, Aztech has finished parts of their platform and will probably finish it in time. The delay pushed the project beyond its targeted date in 2085 for an additional three or four years. In the meantime, S-K started mining the asteroid, which they would do anyway.
- Orbital DK

INSIDE SAEDER-KRUPP

Working for the dragon is eventually not different from working for any other company except that the CEO is a huge frigging lizard that will outlive every one of his em-

ployees, even if they are elven. Not if they are immortal elves, of course, but I doubt there are any of those working for S-K. Just a gut feeling. Anyhow, I digress.

While every S-K associate knows at least one story of an employee who got eaten by Lofwyr for his failure, in many cases it's a corporate (urban) legend that is used as a running gag (you normally would get reassigned for a new job, like scrubbing toilets in Romania). And while both his draconic and human form (especially with that grey hair and the staring golden eyes) can scare the shit of people, most *S-K-lites* (i.e., your common corporate employee at the bottom of the food chain) view the boss as a somewhat benevolent leader. They even appreciate that the corporation is in the hands of a singular being who is not driven by shortsighted profits and risky endeavors that put the company (and their jobs) at risk, but rather looks toward the long-term success, growth, and stability of the megacorporation. This guard against loss and uncertainty is used by Corporate Central for recruiting advantages, as they paint Lofwyr as a father figure (or shepherd minus the religious aspects but with the same *Unterwürfigkeit*) in the spirit of Alfred Krupp (the original founder of Krupp) rather than the feared emperor his enemies describe him as.

- No wonder that S-K doctrine is so successful with Germans and other North Europeans.
- Goat Foot

- Not just Northern Europeans. A recent survey showed that sixty-one percent of all Europeans, twenty-four percent of the UCASians, and twenty-nine percent of the CAS population would like to work for Saeder-Krupp. While in North America it still ranks behind Horizon, Ares, and NeoNET (at least for now), their results are climbing from survey to survey. S-K is so popular in Europe that analysts think German could replace English as the *lingua franca* in the next ten to twenty years.
- Sunshine

- In Germany, S-K now faces the enormously popular Chancellor Anikka Beloit. People often have sympathy for her and for S-K, as many common people still differentiate between governments and corporations—or in this case don't see their antagonism.
- Aufheben

Working for S-K is considered by many a privilege, not only because S-K pays above the average of other megacorporations. In addition (and depending on the level), S-K can be extremely generous with regards to the benefits in terms of health care (even covering augmentations), old-age pensions, benefits on S-K products (like cars, cheap fuel and services), holidays in S-K resorts, free flights with S-K airlines, living amenities (pay-per-view trideo channels), family benefits (school education, protection service) and many more. When you are one of the few lucky beings living in a first-tier Saeder-Krupp corporate enclave, even as a normal wage slave you will live in luxury. You will have access to free public transport, upper-class supermarkets and restaurants, corporate schools, sports clubs, and so on. S-K is extremely proud of its youth promotion. Every young first-tier citizen will be made a member of the Saeder-Krupp Globetrotters, S-K's worldwide youth organization. Here you will travel the world (like visiting the S-K Main Arcology), attend summer camps, music schools, or take part in any kind of sports (with S-K Gaming they even have a remarkable eSports team). S-K even tolerates smaller "insubordinate" youth groups, allowing them to express their youth culture as long as it doesn't stop people from becoming a loyal working drone later on.

- Other corps doing it the same way, but I can't recall NeoNET putting *that* much effort into the youth.
- X-Prime

While some of these things can be acquired by reaching certain positions, S-K possesses a bonus program called "Accentives" (casually called "Cents") that awards these advantages to other job levels for people who have earned them. While not corp scrip, Cents has evolved as a kind of internal S-K currency, since Cents can be used as payment or donated to other corp citizens. Since S-K has been on top of the megacorporate ladder for decades, it had the leeway to reinvest some gains into corporate amenities (like the construction and maintenance of the corporate resorts) to show that they "honor" their employee's work by "giving back."

The downside from all these benefits is that S-K citizens tend to develop a supremacist attitude. This attitude is called the "Saeder-Krupp swagger," but it's nothing more than pure classism.

- Classism is similar to racism—you won't get discriminated by your ethnic background or your metatype, but rather by your social status. A behavior you can observe with several corporate citizens, but it's most common with S-K folks.
- Kay St. Irregular

Most S-K-lites (and higher echelons) look down on every non-corporate citizen, and non-corporate citizens working for S-K or one of its subsidiaries are just slightly better. They partly accept other corporate citizens as equals, but only true S-K citizens are on par with them. That doesn't mean all S-K employees are a bunch of intolerant bastards, like beat cops or Humanis idiots you meet on the streets. It's often a mixture of elitism and hidden prejudices, though from time to time you will find a snobbish S-K manager who will not like you, especially when you are SINless.

Besides this behavior you may encounter on first-tier S-K citizens around the globe, S-K might be one of the most tolerant employers in the world. At Saeder-Krupp you can find every metatype, even exotic ones and metasapients, speaking any language (though when communicating with headquarters, German or English is preferred) and coming from every nation or ethnicity. S-K was also one of the first corps to actively include technomancers. They only have a problem with AIs. Many think it's because they can't assure loyalty, but I think it's more of a problem with Lofwyr's distrust in them, which has trickled down the corp. He has a problem with understanding synthetic intelligence, as he can't control them. He may even fear them. That's one reason S-K undertook such harsh measures against head cases, and why I was extremely astonished they accepted monads into their lines.

- Wonders happen all the time. Expediency and opportunity overcome fear.
- Plan 9

DRACONIC NEO-FEUDALISM

While the boss was one of the first kind to understand how the Sixth World works, he only partially adapted to our modern, human ways. Actually, if you look at how Saeder-Krupp is structured, you find parallels with the empires of old like the Roman Empire. As with most dragons, especially great ones, Lofwyr is a territorial being, with the difference that his domain is not limited to a geographical region or hoard like many of his other fellow dragons. Saeder-Krupp, with all its multiple corporations and property all being his domain, and the headquarters in Neu-Essen being the center of this empire. This may help show how Saeder-Krupp sees itself more as a country rather then a corporation. It was never just about profit—it was about sustaining a population. As such Saeder-Krupp is quite old-fashioned and very hierarchical. You will see very few of the decentralized structures, GroupThink, and networks that Horizon has, but you find big monolithic structures resembling governments.

GLOBAL MANAGEMENT

LOFWYR

As somebody who faced the dragon several times (in both his human and true form), I have to say that his presence leaves a lasting, intimidating impression—and not only because you'll likely soil yourself out of fear, despite all professionalism. Lofwyr is surrounded by a permanent aura of power. As a human, his golden eyes pierce right through you; as a dragon, his glorious, golden scalation and his sheer size—even among the great dragons there are few that can measure up to the Gold Master (which, according to a dossier I read, seems to be the translation of his draconic name)—renders you speechless. Apart from his razor-sharp mind and ability to follow very complex technical explanations, the tone of his dealings with his subordinates is set by the hierarchy that characterizes his corporation. His instructions are cold, precise, and issued in a commanding tone that tolerates no dissent and could spontaneously freeze water. His conduct contradicts the image of a benevolent all-father corporate leaders attempt to convey. Additionally, Lofwyr, if provoked, can be extremely unforgiving and vindictive. Besides Horizon (after Horizon's admission into the megacorp clique, the boss's office had to be renovated), there are a few organizations or people (such as Aithne Oakforest) that can make him lose his self-control. Normally, Lofwyr spends the majority of his time in his "office" (which actually is more of a chamber loaded with SOTA electronic equipment) in which he processes the incredible amounts of data provided to him by S-K Prime and the new Oversight Office.

- I always wondered how Lofwyr feels about the golden Lofwyr plush figures that these S-K stores sell.
- Sounder

- They are mostly sold to S-K Globetrotters, which helps communicate his role as benevolent father-figure even for the youngest corporate citizen. So I can imagine that he was the one who ordered them to be made.
- Heisenberg

CORPORATE OVERSIGHT OFFICE

For a long time the Corporate Oversight Office was just the boss alone. But the S-K crisis made the dragon think about some changes. In the past, every bit of information about what happened in the corporation and beyond went directly to Lofwyr and S-K-Prime. Afterward he gave orders, wrote strategy papers, and gave out long-term goals. He micromanaged every bit of his empire. But as we have seen, this system wasn't invulnerable. So he reformed the Oversight Office. Where in the past information flowed upwards and orders downwards, there is now some sort of virtual ubiquitous conference meeting. It's a huge database, capable of generating projections and long-term outcomes based on the information and opinions it gets. You can see it as a miniature of Horizon's Consensus, but not without it's overall power. Lofwyr still has the last word in every decision, but the OO can generate options, based on the opinions of its members, so they can find a democratic position on certain things. This should ensure capacity to act when he is not present, or give his underlings some autonomy. If he wants to.

- I think most of the metahuman members of the OO would be unable to process all the data Lofwyr would normally do, so he installed this database. It doesn't replace a dragon brain, but it definitely helps humans to see the broader picture.
- Frosty

- It's important to understand the difference between the Consensus and the OO database. While Horizon uses his database to *make* decisions, S-K uses theirs to *find* decisions. Lofwyr still has his problems with AIs, so he did not want a "thing" that could overrule decisions he makes. It's just a tool, not a master.
- Clockwork

Access is restricted, though, and just the regional managers, a representative from S-K Prime and the Innenrevision, the other members of the global management, and key figures like Hyvönen and Montejac are part of it.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

The Dutch **Roel Vandenhoeck** is S-K's shining primary spokesperson who runs the PR department in Neu-Essen and appears every time there's something to announce, soothe, or whitewash. Since Lofwyr never used a metahuman voice to directly communicate with metahumanity in all his time at the top of S-K, the artful, arrogant showman (an elf, of course) fills this void in general public at large and in Germany in particular. Whenever the shit really hits the fan, Vandenhoeck's commlink is the first to buzz, followed by the "pink line" (red carries calls from the boss) at S-K Prime, because he will ask for all relevant information to start spin-doctoring. Even though Vandenhoeck pretends to be a trés chic windbag in front of the cameras willing to coax anybody into anything (thanks to his smoldering good looks and pheromones), he actually is a keen observer. Since the crisis he also has kept an eye on all Horizon-operations in Europe (with full support of S-K Prime).

GLOBAL HUMAN RESOURCES

Head of Global Human Resources is **Cheyenne Galais**, a Québec-born dwarf woman who handles all workforce-related issues. She and her staff administer the corporate SIN register, has a dossier on every S-K employee, and together with the finance department supervises every form of Accentives and privileges. She also keeps track on every possible future employee (extraction targets) and even some special deniable assets (shadowrunners and mercenaries) that have great worth for the corp. HR works closely with internal affairs office and S-K Prime, but they also have their own agents. Normally these check for potential mages or technomancers, but they also investigate cases of suspicious corporate SINs or missing employees. Now they are under supervision of the Innenrevision and mostly search for head cases.

- Her department is responsible to distribute and track fake corporate S-K SINs when they are needed for a run. S-K mostly gives you some freedom, but remember you are being watched.
- Kia

FINANCE

The Head of Finance of Saeder-Krupp is an eighty-year-old Turkish-German named **Mesut Şahin**. He joined with Lofwyr after he took over BMW and was instantly made CFO. He is known for executing the orders of the boss to the letter, without question. He studied mathematics and economics in Frankurt and became professor of corporate finance. His lectures must have caught the attention of Lofwyr, as he brought him in quickly. Now he supervises the S-K corporate currency, the cash flow, and employee privileges, and he coordinates with the vast network of banks owned by S-K.

- The finance divisions of S-K—like many others—offers special services for corporate citizens. For example, every first-tier employee has all his insurance at the Rheinischer Versicherungsbund (Rhenish Insurance Union) in Cologne and their retirement provisions handled by Commerzbank in Greater Frankfurt.
- Mr. Bonds

LAW

A dryad named **Evelyn Westlake** is the Chief Legal Officer and originates from Portland. She worked for Lofwyr at the time—he was part of the Council of Princes—and later moved to Manhattan to work with S-K's legal department. Her aversion toward cities seems to be less intense than other dryads, though she still requested an office near Central Park. Due to her litigation success, Hyvönen requested her relocation to Essen to help her with the groundwork for the formation of Neu-Essen. Later she was made the new CLO, as the former was sent to ZO some time earlier.

- She definitely welcomed the reconstruction measures undertaken to build Neu-Essen. The lakes, parks and the city forest helps her to adapt to the new surrounding, while it also shielded her from the cesspool the remaining Ruhrplex is.
- Ecotope

GLOBAL OPERATIONS

S-K AFRICA

The Africa division of S-K is headquartered in Cape Town and is lead by Mathis Asamoah, an Afro-German

whose parents fled from Ghana some seventy years ago. He graduated from Saeder-Krupp Business School in Essen and was sent to Cape Town, where he eventually became division head. The division supervises S-K's mining and magical resource gathering and research in sub-Saharan Africa but also has some limited agricultural and manufacturing interest in some areas. The biggest factory complexes you may find in the corporate enclave around Wenchi on the Ivory Coast (which is not extraterritorial *de jure*, as there is no country who could grant it). The main antagonists for S-K in this area are DeBeers-Omnitech (UO), Global Sandstorm, and recent arrival Eastern Tiger.

S-K ASIA

Asia was given to Mariene Carstairs, a former manager of the BMW era, who still knew Michel and Mina Beloit personally. But the crisis showed her that she was getting old, so she resigned. She moved to Neu-Essen, now working partly via Matrix for a corporate intern consulting service. Her successor is Alina Hashem, a businesswomen from Bangla Commonwealth, where S-K Asia also has its headquarters. While the dragon has nearly full control over the Commonwealth and runs many factories and offices there, in the rest of Asia, S-K is rather scattered. They have some financial corps, like Swiss Banking Corporation in Hong Kong and Nippon Credit and Trust in Neo-Tokyo, while their biggest industrial operations is probably Messerschmitt-Kawasaki in Kobe, Kansai Sprawl (which has a second HQ in Munich).

- S-K recently made some deals with Korean AA corp Yang Su Enterprises to support their agricultural operations in Asia and Australia. One more step to challenge Shiawase's agricultural power.
- Baka Dabora

S-K AUSTRALIA

S-K Australia's HQ is situated in Perth and is also responsible for New Zealand and the Pacific. The local executive officer Kura Reed has good contacts to Dr. Makram Zhara, who often visits local Awakened World Research and is rumored to have a personal research group within. Besides magic phenomenon, Reed supervises mining and extraction operations via Kinesys and AN Meridian and energy production via Vulcan Systems. But she still has to fend of attacks by Aztech, Shiawase, and ETC, that increased in intensity in recent years. Luckily she has a powerful ally in form of Tanamyre Resources, who have shielded S-K in the past from these attacks. Now Reed and Tanamyre CEO Peter Lawler are working closer to form joint ventures, many in the magical sector.

- The former division head Edwin Hauser wandered into the Outback in the '60s and was never seen again. Reed and others never give up hope to find him one day. Every now and then they organize expeditions into the wastes to search for any clues where he might have went.
- Cosmo

S-K EUROPE

The headquarters of S-K Europa is Neu-Essen, but as every bit of information from every regional office and subsidiary go directly to Lofwyr anyway, there is actually no such thing like a Europe division. The main protagonists here are Lofwyr (obviously), Vanadis Hyvönen (his "Governor" of Neu-Essen and second-in-command), Julien Sergetti (NEEC politics) and Stanislaw Wiacek (responsible for Eastern Europe). Europe is the heart of Lofwyr's empire, so he does everything to keep it under his claws. Sure, there are other players, like NeoNET, Z-IC (the biggest European AA), and since the Esprit takeover even Aztechnology and many other AAs that are part of the NEEC challenge S-K every time they can. In the past, they had no luck, as Lofwyr always struck back at them, but recently the other AAs made several attacks during and shortly after the dragon conflict, and even had some limited success. But now as the power shifts with the Megacorporate Audit, new alliances are forming and bigger attacks on S-K have abruptly stopped. Now S-K is working on a fragile alliance with NeoNET in Europe with the sole purpose of helping them get back on top.

- Europe was always densely packed with local corporations that in some cases date back to the nineteenth century, which made expansion attempts from the outside often unsuccessful. Nonetheless you can find some foreign powers. Aztech sits in the south, NeoNET in the UK and Scandinavia, and Evo is coming from the east. S-K was never as unchallenged as it is often portrayed. Still, S-K is the biggest corp in Europe, and Lofwyr pulls the strings in the background of the NEEC, as he has always done.
- Mr. Bonds

In addition to all European activities, the division also handles all assets in space, Arctic, Antarctica, and Trans-Polar-Aleut. They report directly to S-K Europe, as most of them are (undersea) mining operations anyway.

S-K MIDDLE EAST

S-K Middle East was the regional division that was often in the media because of the damage it took in recent years. As Hestaby destroyed the seat of the regional division in Dubai, it was forced to move to the Ziggurat arcology in Basra. Neither was the new HQ so glamorous, nor was it in the Arabian Caliphate, which was demanded by Lofwyr. So Reza Mohammad Bakr

pulled every string in his hand to start reconstruction of the Dubai facility. The next disaster was the defection of Saied Bey, Lofwyr's troubleshooter in Istanbul, to Global Sandstorm. He managed to attract some assets to defect with him, including Iraq Oil, which weakened the position of S-K in the Middle East. With the reconstruction of the Dubai arcology nearly complete, Bakr has to reclaim S-K's position in the Middle East and deal with upstarts like GS in order to avoid a "relocation."

S-K NORTH AMERICA

The Charlotte-based S-K North America had some losses in the past years. During the last stages of the dragon civil war, former division head Ludmilla Reanka was assassinated. This caused some chaos within the division and encouraged several competitors to attack S-K assets. Just as the division caught some breath, Boston was locked down, and so S-K lost an important site on the East Coast. Now S-K NorthAm is going through a restructuring process, as the new regional manager has arrived. His name is Klaus Basoski. Born in 2033, he became one of the youngest managers of BMW at only thirty-four years old. He is known for his playboy lifestyle and his fondness for archeology, which made him some friends within the Apep Consortium.

The regional division is split into two subdivisions called S-K Northwest and S-K Northeast. Northwest is located in Portland and supervises every activity on the West Coast (including Seattle) and most of the NAN states. In the past S-K was banned in most of the NAN states but could negotiate some deals after the Crash to gain official business licenses. Northeast is located in Manhattan and is responsible for CAS, UCAS, Québec, Denver, and the Algonkian-Manitou Concil.

- S-K has to look for a new hotspot for its operations to replace Boston. Though not the biggest S-K site in North America, Boston handled thousands of business customers in Massachusetts and along the East Coast, and operatives there were able to keep an eye on NeoNET and Boston's magical groups and societies.
- Southie

S-K SOUTH AMERICA

The former head of the South American division, António Ortega, was recently relocated to Neu-Essen for a special task. He was replaced by Carlos Roberto Lima, an Amazonian refugee living in Argentina, who joined S-K with Ortega. Neither he nor S-K has any love for Amazonia, but the megacorp supported the country in the war with Aztlan. Now, after the war, S-K faces several attacks by shadowrunners hired by Aztech, as the relationship of the two corps is at an all-time low since Aztech accused Lofwyr of the assassination of Eyes-of-Wyrm. The Big A is unforgiving. S-K has concentrated their power on certain strongholds, like Montevideo, Kourou in French Guiana, Curacao (personally owned by Lofwyr), and several places in Argentina.

PORTFOLIO DEVELOPMENT AND MARKET FORCES

Since Lofwyr's return, there has been a flood of new seminars, task groups, strategy meetings, and analyst talks all around the S-K empire. All of them circle around the topic of new markets, innovation, and further expansions (e.g., takeovers). Company consultants can earn a drekload of money right now. The main conversation about new markets is to further establish S-K in the Chinese successor states. There is no precise strategy yet, but progress is happening.

Beside these onetime meetings there are also long-lasting teams and task groups, like the already mentioned "Fall Magenta." If my sources are correct, Fall Magenta prepares and coordinates all of S-K's NeoNET acquisitions. It is led by **António Ortega,** and he might be the leading force behind the idea to grant monads citizenship. In the end, they are skilled scientists, programmers, or are highly capable in other areas. S-K needs them to regain their former strength, but they also watch every step they make. This alliance, like the one with NeoNET, might be just based on time, and I don't want to think what the dragon will do to them afterwards. Anyway, Ortega has access to any resource he wants to bring down NeoNET when the time comes. But this also means that his whole career (others say his life) depends on the success of his plan, so he will not allow any failures made by him or his subordinates (including hired shadowrunners).

Another new task group is assigned with innovation. Besides the research and development, it also has a small subdivision called the "Fast Response Group." It works closely with Vandenhoeck's PR department and S-K-Prime to get the newest information on the latest products from the major competitors and then starts to develop similar or even better products for S-K or one of its subsidiaries. Of course, in order to do that, they rely heavily on industrial espionage and sometimes need to delay the development of the competitor's product, which in the end will probably be your task.

The last person I want to talk about here is **Isabelle Corbeau**, who defected from Shiawase. She works now for S-K to strengthen the European agricultural market. One thing you have to know is that Europe kept a fair amount of traditional farming. We all love soy, but often it's simply too cold or too expensive to grow it. So in Europe, beside some drawbacks (like the mass extinction of bees), you can get several products for decent prices, things that cost up to six times as much in North

America. The changes European agricorps made so that farming could work this way happen to be the root of the problems it has today. For example, you still have huge amount of traditional cattle, but they are bred and genetically modified to produce the highest amounts of milk, meat, or eggs possible, and they need a big pharmaceutical cocktail every now and then just to stay alive. This made the cattle vulnerable to CFD, and there were some reported cases (though it is not easy to detect). Also, Europe had a blizzard followed by a harsh winter in '75-'76, leading to a great vermin problem, which caused significant harm to the agricultural industry. This situation, combined with the general state on the world market, led to prices rising and even some products completely vanishing from the shelves. I wouldn't say it's a famine yet, but it's tense. And this brings me back to Corbeau, as she is tasked to find a solution, because the last thing Lofwyr needs are riots when he is on the way to reclaim his former position at the top of the corporate food chain.

- Hungry minions aren't productive minions.
- Nephrine

SECURITY AND ARMED FORCES

SECURITY FORCES

Saeder-Krupp's security forces are well-trained and well-equipped, mostly with weapons and armor made by S-K. Though they search on the local market for new employees, today many members of the security forces are drafted from corporate citizens (and thus are fully into the corporate ideology). In the past, the local managers were responsible for their own security forces, with the regional managers supervising them and moving certain forces to secure key locations. After the dragon conflict, this system proved to be insufficient. Lofwyr has now created the position of Chief Security Officer, which he gave to **Karen Montejac**.

Montejac has been Lofwyr's personal assistant for over a decade, although she was technically head of security regarding the dragon in Essen and was later promoted to head of security for all of Germany (and now worldwide). The ageless woman uses magic to keep her appearance youthful and striking. There has been a long-running rumor that Montejac is actually a smaller dragon or a drake like S-K-Prime's agent Scale, but both are wrong. Based on her diet, I would say she is HMHVV-infected, probably a wendigo. That's the latest rumor, anyway.

- A common job from S-K Mr. Johnsons is to test their own corporate security. Every time there is a new team, security director, new equipment, or a new security concept, they initialize a test run to see if it could withstand an attack. If the team succeeds, it may be able to gain access to more lucrative jobs from S-K.
- Cosmo

CORPORATE MILITARY

The corporate military is, with just a few exceptions, exclusively drafted from corporate citizens to ensure their loyalty. They are, beside the Ares military, the best-trained and -equipped corporate military force. Like the regular security forces, they use mainly equipment produced by S-K and its subsidiaries. As a deterrent, S-K has an arsenal of atomic weapons (stationed in the SOX), and also anti-dragon weapons, once developed in the early twenty-first century against Feuerschwinge (though they saw no use during Lofwyr's fight with Alamais—maybe he didn't want to provoke his peers). Most of S-K's military are just used as garrison forces in key locations, like Neu-Essen, Berlin, or Curacao, but some units saw limited action during the Desert Wars or Rad Wars in the SOX. They are also used to guard S-K property in crisis regions, like the Sarajevo Airport or the Trans-Afghan Highway. For emergencies, S-K fields a rapid-response company, air transportable to any point of the world within twenty-four hours.

S-K's military is led by a group of military commanders nicknamed **"junta,"** formed by former military officers, military advisors and experts from its defense divisions.

CORPORATE INTELLIGENCE

INNENREVISION

S-K's famous internal affairs office, called the Innenrevision, came to special prominence as "the Inquisition" during the CFD crisis. Its duties encompass keeping everyone on track so every drone can fulfill their assigned job. To do that, Innenrevision employs sociologists, psychologists, and criminologists to create profiles for every employee (with additional help by S-K Prime, corporate security, and human resources) from the first and second tier. These profiles are used to find the perfect treatment for every citizen, if necessary. Further more they run a system called *Devianz*, which analyzes deviation from a citizen's baseline data. In the past Innenrevision helped S-K during the Emergence to spot, monitor, and later integrate technomancers into the corporation, as well as during the tempo crisis to find drug addicts and dealers. Now, with the help of *Devianz*, the internal affairs office is busy uncovering CFD victims (though the system just identifies the most noticeable ones), as well as monitoring the newly integrated monads.

- As S-K is keen to prevent a mass panic, they let shadowrunnners extract the head cases, so nobody becomes suspicious when a coworker suddenly vanished. The runners

have to leave some traces behind, so everyone knows what happened, while the head cases are sent to a S-K black site for "research purposes."
- Haze

Innrevision has been led for over ten years by the Brussels-born **Médard Vogen**. The Belgian, in his mid-fifties, is deemed to be absolutely humorless, uncompromising, asocial, and a proper pedant who reigns over his department with brutal efficiency (and fear). Vogen always wears latex gloves and avoids large crowds, which earned him the reputation as a telepath or psionic. A mage of that discipline would certainly make sense at the top of such an organization, though it might just be germaphobia. Since the beginning of the crisis, Vogen has been supported by some new additions. While the Swiss **Gian Chabli**—a former officer of the Swiss military who served as strategical advisor for many years in Warsaw—is in charge of tactical operations, **Tiejun Gupta**, a former employee of the Sri Lankan Vedacorp, is his acting nanotech consultant.

- Gupta is an expert for medical nanotech and frequently got in touch with Doctors Reinhard and Fitzgerald in New York, until Reinhard vanished. Rumor says that either Renraku or MCT extracted her and her family, but her true whereabouts are unknown.
- The Smiling Bandit

The newly added military task forces, who are in charge of arresting dangerous infected personnel, were under the command by the Chief Inquisitor **Basima Oriol Diasruíz**, who was transferred to Neu-Essen after the destruction of S-K's arcology in Dubai. Rumor has it that the techomancer known as Mihna ("testing") is capable of "hearing" (or detecting) the virus, which led to her promotion and eventual seat on the Corporate Court. She has not yet been replaced as chief inquisitor, and is said to be squeezing some time in the role between her Corporate Court duties.

Currently Innenrevision is also working on a new non-invasive method to detect CFD cases, as Devianz is not one hundred percent accurate and a full bioscan may not be possible every time. The research group led by anthropologist and psychologist **Mackzie Witt** and sensoric specialist **Mateo Goddard** constructed a psychoanalytical test, testing the humanity and empathetic behavior of an individual. But the Witt-Goddard-Test still has flaws, as it also lists several high-ranking managers as false positives, due to their lack of empathy.

S-K PRIME

If Innenrevision is Saeder-Krupp's FBI, then S-K Prime is its black-ops CIA and NSA combined. The high-tech organization is the nerve center of all Saeder-Krupp inter-corporate operations and intelligence. It has many physical offices around the world, but since its creation, it was always a complete virtual intelligence service. So S-K Prime has no physical headquarters—even the offices in Neu-Essen are just that: offices. The arsenal and staff at S-K Prime's disposal (cybertacticians, tech wizards, data analysts, troubleshooters, augmented field agents, and so on) can put countries and other corporations to shame. HUMINT, SOCMINT, and SIGINT go directly to Hyvönen and Vandenhoeck (and Lofwyr) to keep them up to date. Its field agents can be found in various places, fulfilling various roles, including a few who are deep undercover. You have managers in other corporations, public officials, politicians, high-society fashionistas, members of organized crime, street worker, and even shadowrunners. Either one of these gather information or fulfill certain missions. During the CFD crisis it became obvious that several of S-K Prime's augmented field agents became infected. These rogue agents sometimes turned against S-K, or other corps, or—in cases of infected **Brackhauses**—used S-K's resources for their own agenda.

- S-K hires runners to hunt down these infected agents and Johnsons, as a audit by Innenrevision would be impossible in many cases.
- Icarus

S-K Prime has a dual leadership. The former Corporate Court judge **Jean-Claude Priault** heads the strategic division, while **Dimitri Baichik** command the hidden networks, virtual resources, intelligence, and Matrix surveillance operations, including spysats. Priault is a not very charismatic person and is not liked by many people. But he has the authority and rhetoric skills, as well as the viciousness that made him famous during his time as a judge. Baichik, on the other hand, is even an odd person under the nerds. The bald, glasses-wearing Matrix expert and hacker has an IQ of over 150 and is rumored to be a technomancer.

DRACO PROXY

Though you may get the impression that S-K managers are helpless without the involvement of their master, S-K actually employs several competent individuals Lofwyr can count on, even when he is absent. And it doesn't matter if it's a lobbyist, a troubleshooter, or covert-ops agent; every one of them is crucial for Saeder-Krupp's success.

LOBBYISTS AND HENCHMEN

VANADIS HYVÖNEN

The "governor" is, besides Lofwyr, the most important person in S-K Europe. The Finnish elf has been rigorously clawing her way up the corporate ladder and is

defending her position grimly. She took over her current post as chief negotiator for corporate-political affairs and earthbound assistant to Jean-Claude Priault fifteen years ago when she was transferred back to earth thanks to her merits as the director of the orbital factory Himmelsschmiede. Hyvönen's main task is to make sure that everything "at home" works according to Lofwyr's wishes. Accordingly, she has been vested with extensive authority in the corporation's macrocosm. As S-K's direct chief negotiator in all political affairs, she's in constant contact both the state and the federal government as well as the Federal Council of the AGS, although the contact to the federal authorities is mainly maintained by S-K's NEEC-minister Gustav Moeller. She has a reputation, however, of being an extremely uptight and rigid negotiator that has been taught by one of the best (namely Priault) and forged to extreme relentlessness and mercilessness.

- In negotiations with Anikka Beloit, she has found an worthy opponent.
- Fianchetto

Though mostly concerned with the AGS and the Ruhrplex, she maintains a direct connection to Brackhaus and the other Johnsons in the European shadows and beyond, if necessary.

CLAUDIA ROMANOV

A former model with a ruthless, keen intellect, Claudia Romanov has been an agent for Lofwyr for decades. The elf is his main tool to keep a watchful eye on the Grand Tour and the European high society—or we should say was. After breaking up the engagement of then-Princess Caroline and Johnny Spinrad and some jobs during the dragon conflict, she has not been seen in the society circles recently. Many say she's suffering post-natal depression after giving birth to her and Spinrad's daughter (which was the way she stopped the engagement). I've heard that Johnny tried to extract his daughter, and so Romanov went incognito for a while.

- One of the last major events she attended was the coronation of Irion Reanka, Ludmilla Reanka's brother, as the new duke of Pomorya. There she met Aithne Oakforest, who know resides there. I think the two might have a talk, and since then she is not very keen to be seen in public.
- Frosty

JULIAN SERGETTI

Julian Sergetti is S-K's main lobbyist in Brussels. The man from southern Italy is charismatic and intelligent, knows everyone of importance in Europe's capital, and can get appointments with every politician within hours. He informs the OO about every political movement in Brussels. In the past he was working hard against NeoNET, specifically Transys Neuronet and Erika, where he often faces off against Anders Malmstein. Now he has to change his attitude, as S-K has formed an alliance with NeoNET due to the Megacorporate Audit. Recently he was often seen with S-K's NEEC-minister Gustav Moeller, discussing matters like the changes in NEEC corporate seats and the relocation of the Corporate Policy Commission from Brussels to Greater Frankfurt.

HAROLD TWO MOON

Harold Two Moon was responsible for opening the NAN market for Saeder-Krupp in exchange for opening the European market for NAN corps. The charismatic Lakotan lobbyist can be found in political as well as high-society events, and he keeps an eye on the NAN for the dragon. He is present when the Sovereign Tribal Council meets, and he can be found as a visitor on every important national debate in any NAN state. He also monitors the actions of Henequen, Ghostwalker and the situation in Denver. When not working for the boss, he runs a PR agency in Cheyenne, which grants him access to society circles and sensitive business information.

- Recently he was actively working to undermine FBA's influence in the NAN. The arch-rival of S-K created the subsidiary Native American Nations Banking Corporation (NANBC) some years ago (with the help of Ares, who served as door opener). The NANBC is active in every NAN state and increasing their power. Though still small, Two Moon hires several runners to sabotage every move of FBA in the NAN.
- Kay St. Irregular

IN THE DRAGON'S SHADOW

AWRAH

The fictional identity "Awrah" is a code name used for several female agents working within Muslim societies. Deployed in either Northern Africa, Balkan, Middle East, South and South East Asia or Sprawls with huge Muslim minorities, it's still easy for a woman to go unnoticed within the Islamic world. That is mainly achieved, because Awrah dresses and behaves like an unremarkable Muslim woman, wearing the normal local cultural dress (which are normally various regional versions of the hijab but can also be abaya and niquad, a burqa, chador, jilbab, dupatta or a tudong). In recent years Awrahs were involved in preventing Global Sandstorm's takeover of the Apep Consortium and denying further expansion into Egypt. Now they will definitely send to Constantinople for operations against Saided Bey.

HANS BRACKHAUS

Based on old company records, BMW's subsidiary Thyssen-Krupp employed a man named Hans Brackhaus back in the '20s. He was known as a takeover expert and scored several coups for the Beloits, and even later for his new masters, after Lofwyr took over BMW and created S-K. The tracks of this genuine Brackhaus were lost in the mid-'40s. Nonetheless, he has popped up very frequently since then and it is believed that Brackhaus became an alias used by Lofwyr himself and other people within the corporation to hire shadowrunners.

- I would guess it was an alias ever since, even under the Beloits.
- Thorn

Even today a Hans Brackhaus can be seen around the world hiring teams to work for S-K. Whether that's Lofwyr, S-K-Prime agents, or just some S-K employee who got to know the story is unclear. The fact is, if a Brackhaus wants to hire you, you will be offered a highly lucrative but also highly dangerous job. These days this might be truer then ever, as there are also these Crackhauses out there. A Crackhaus is basically an CFD-infected S-K-Prime agent, who went rogue and is using his resources for his personal agenda.

BASIMA ORIOL DIASRUIZ

The Iraqi woman with Spanish roots was born 2042 in the S-K-arcology in Bagdad, where she spent most of her childhood. She started her training to become a security spider, comprising both IT-education and combat training, when she was only sixteen years old. Later on, she was officially employed as a spider in the Bagdad mainframe, but rumor has it that she was actually carrying out Matrix-sabotage operations for S-K-Prime in the Middle East during that time. According to internal information, it is most likely that she operated as one of the Awrahs in the Islamic world and underwent extensive espionage training (melee combat, weapons, infiltration) prior to her emer-

gence in the aftermath of Crash 2.0. After her emergence, she was transferred to the arcology in Dubai, where she worked closely with Reza Bakr. Following the destruction of the arcology by the great dragon Hestaby, she was moved to Neu-Essen. Due to her extraordinary ability to detect the nanovirus, she was transferred to internal auditing, where she served as chief inquisitor, reporting to Lofwyr directly. She was so efficient in her job that Lofwyr promoted her up to Corporate Court justice, where she could use her information-gathering abilities and ruthlessness in an entirely new way. Diasruíz has cultivated a modern, female corporate chic with neo-Arabic influences and is considered a style icon by many S-K employees.

SCALE

As a master of disguise, Scale has many forms. There are many rumors of who or what Scale really is, ranging from a spirit to a drake. What's known for sure is that Scale can change his appearance, though he is often seen as a slick-looking raven-haired elf male with dark grey eyes and sharply defined features. His role is also unclear. Officially (when you can call it that way), he acts as Lofwyr's expediter and messenger. But in my time at S-K Prime, Scale often acted as a troubleshooter, Johnson, and sometimes executioner.

DENS AND HOARDS

S-K is a centralized empire led by a dragon, but Lofwyr cannot be everywhere at once. So it maintains certain key locations around the world, from which S-K managers and Lofwyr's henchmen enforce the will of their master. Especially in Europe, you will find whole urban districts owned by S-K or one of its major subsidiaries. But you also encounter Lofwyr's soldiers in exotic places, like the Cadmus Deep Sea Habitat located at the Iberian Abyssal Plain, the Curie Nuclear Base in the SOX, or the Mt. Kirkpatrick Arcology in the Antarctic. But today I want to show you just one very special place.

NEU-ESSEN

I know what you're thinking, but Neu-Essen is a real nice place. I used to live there in a three-room flat apartment with a view on the Baldeneysee (Balderney Lake) and the S-K Main Arcology. And though there are still many construction sites left, they surely build the perfect corporate utopia. But lets get to the facts. Neu-Essen—or Lofwyr Town, as foreigners call it—is a ninety-square-kilometer extraterritorial enclave (nearly half the size of Everett), fully owned by Saeder-Krupp. It is an functional city with about the same population as the rest of Essen, and it's located in the former southwest section of the city. It was formed around S-K's world headquarters on September 14, 2072 and has been under constant construction since.

- While purchasing all the properties, S-K came across the local branch of the Draco Foundation, which owned a skyscraper in the district of Rüttenscheid. Based on the Passau Contracts, DF has extraterritorial rights on German soil. But due to a trick (probably orchestrated by Hyvönen), S-K could prove that the Foundation didn't own that property but rather leased it. So Lofwyr kicked them out, and they moved to Bergenhausen, just outside of Neu-Essen.
- Red Anya

You can find everything here: restaurants, grocery stores, kindergartens, schools, museums and art galleries, hospitals, fire and police stations, a congress center—they even have an airport and a university complex. But the main attraction is, of course, the **S-K Main Arcology**. It's over 566 meters high, while in addition there are also several hundred meters below ground. The arcology was constructed on the location of the Krupp family's old house, the Villa Hügel. It was excavated and rebuilt within the arcology and now functions as a museum. Within S-K's headquarters you can also find a prison, a zoo, shopping malls, heck even a wedding cathedral. But beside all these tourist attractions, the arcology also houses the corporate administration and offices for key branches like the Innenrevision and S-K-Prime.

- And Lofwyr's hoard, I guess.
- Thorn

- I never actively searched for it, but I think so. Probably in the basement, but this may be just one hoard. Lofwyr Awakened in 2012 in the Eifel mountains. S-K still owns a huge piece of land there—nobody knows why, but conspiracy theorists always suggested that there is at least a second hoard.
- Heisenberg

Access to Neu-Essen is restricted. You can enter Lofwyr Town as a normal person, but you need a valid SIN, that is broadcasted active at all times. If you stay longer than an hour, they monitor you and check if there is any connection between you and and a person within the enclave. And if you don't have a working permission, visiting someone living there, or don't engage in any tourist activity, they will kick you out. If you want to actually live there, you need a S-K SIN and a special permission from Global Human Resources. Nonetheless it's the dream of every S-K wageslave to once live or at least visit Neu-Essen. When you are part of the selected few (the best from every part of Lofwyr's empire) you may get permission to move into one of the luxury apartments in the special gated community of **Kettwig**. Access to Kettwig is even more restricted than access to Neu-Essen, as only S-K personnel are allowed to enter. It's worth the risk, as you can find S-K's upper class, the

elite, and the upper echelons of the corporate administration (that don't live in the arcology). Even Hyvönen lives here.

THE DRAGON'S WRATH

You already heard much about ongoing conflicts and new conflicts that will occur sooner or later. Yet you have to differentiate between the agenda of Lofwyr and the agenda of Saeder-Krupp. I know it's hard to believe, but they are not (always) the same. Sometimes S-K subsidiaries get an order, and if they can't fulfill it, they search for people in the shadows who helped them to reach their goals, or they think it's time to harass their competitors, while in other cases Lofwyr will hire shadowrunners (or let them be hired) for his own personal goals. Jobs coming directly or indirectly from Lofwyr himself often have some mysterious element and involve a misdirection game. It's harder then usual to uncover the true identity of your client and even harder to uncover the true motives, as he uses the web of his vast global empire to cover his tracks.

Saeder-Krupp believes in long-term benefits, so it will employ successful runner teams for a long time, as long as they benefit from them. They will pay above-average rates, and you may be granted other bonuses and perhaps become a corporate citizen if you wish (in my opinion there are worse retirement provisions). But as Lofwyr believes in survival of the fittest, you have to bring the right results, or you will lose his grace. To start such a career, S-K will test your skills, often by initiating a run against their own installations, which in turn also tests their security measures.

Running against the dragon can be hard, as S-K still has one of the best security forces on this planet. But if you manage to survive and fulfill your objectives, or do it like they do it in these Hollywood Heist trids, it may happen that you impress the local manager or even the higher echelons, and you can live your life as if nothing happened, or may even get hired by S-K (survival of the fittest). But if your run accidentally crosses the plan of the boss or the local security officer or manager took that run personally, they will hunt you down. No fake ID can save you. It is like they say in their hiring fliers: "We are prepared for you."

- Well, at least that's promising fun.
- Kane

So what jobs can you expect in the near future? They will definitely circle around NeoNET's downfall. On one day you will shield the corp from the vultures who are circling around their prey, while on the other day you while weaken strategic targets to prepare lucrative takeover candidates. And on a different day you may get the order to stop the rats trying to leave the sinking ship. When one enemy falls, others will rise, and S-K wants to be prepared for that day. Of course, you will also run against MCT, either indirectly by supporting their enemies, so it may look like you work for the technomancers. Or there will be a more direct approach, such as destroying their reputation, reducing their workforce, or weakening their production.

This reminds me of one of the internal mottos we often said at S-K Prime: "Corporations rise, corporations fall, but Saeder-Krupp will prevail." You may hit S-K, you may hit it hard, but in the end it will survive and outlast you. That's the vision of the dragon, and his children believe that he can and will do everything to make that happen.

SHIAWASE

The runners arrived at the abandoned warehouse at 1655 hours, five minutes early to the meet. Storm got out of the van first. He scanned the interior of warehouse, where he only spotted two armored limousines inside the building, waiting for them. Mr. Johnson, he presumed.

The team leader gestured to the rest of the team. Soon, three of his teammates—Vendetta, Fade, and Spook—exited the van and followed in step behind him. This left their rigger sitting inside their van. The three human runners advanced to the limo. They moved closer, then closer still, then six men stepped out of the vehicle.

Startled from not recognizing any of the men, Storm inquired nervously in Japanese, "You're not our Mr. Na-ka-udo-san." His hand hovered over the pistol holstered on his hip, waiting to be drawn. He noticed that out of the six men, five of them were armed with sub-machine guns. *This could get ugly fast.* Storm forced himself not to react hastily to the tense situation.

"I am not, burakumin," acknowledged the middle-aged man, positioned in the middle of his bodyguards. "However, he could not be here this evening due to other commitments. But he sent me here with your payment, so long as you've done as he requested."

Storm held up the disposable commlink. "This has all the video evidence your boss requested. On it, you'll see us planting the virus in the factory network's computers, and disabling its quality-assurance diagnostic tools. So just like you wanted, the first batch of five thousand drones will be shipped and arrive at their customers' doorsteps primed to fry their own CPUs as soon as they're switched on. As your boss desired, the manger's reputation will become shamed. He will no longer have a career after tomorrow."

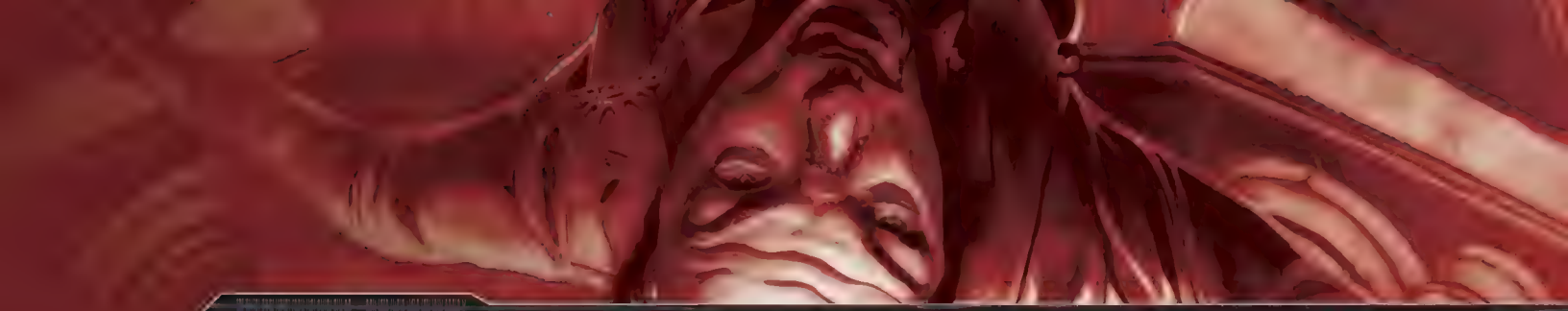
Reviewing the footage, the Shiawase employee then asked, "And what of the break-in? Did you cover it up as well?"

"We followed his instructions to the letter. We stole six of the early models, and they've already been sold to our fixers. They should be making it onto the black market in a few hours' time. The break-in will look like it was meant to steal the drones, so people won't think about sabotage. As you can see, we've earned our pay."

"I suppose you have," the elderly man said, nodding in agreement after he finished reviewing the footage. The man then turned slowly and headed back to the armored limousine. Upon entering the vehicle, the man turned to the head of his security guards. "Pay them."

Suddenly, the sound of rending metal resonated from the runners' van behind them. The three runners turned around to see their van just as they heard their rigger scream and two silenced shots rang out and exploded into the van. Blood splattered across the van's windshield. The three runners turned again and found the security guards leveling their SMGs at them.

And then the barrage of bullets started to fly at runners caught out in the middle of a warehouse with no cover.



SHIAWASE

Corporate Court Ranking: #5
Corporate Slogan: "Advancing Life"
Corporate Status: AAA, public corporation
World Headquarters: Osaka, Japan
President/CEO: Tadashi Shiawase
Chairman of the Board: Reiko Shiawase-Shimada
Major Shareholders: Tadeshi Shiawase (20%), Reiko Shiawase (9%), Empress Hitomi (11%), Shiawase Shinto Advisory Board (19%), Nigel Coltrane (1%)

MAJOR DIVISIONS AND ASSOCIATED SUBSIDIARIES

Shiawase Biofood
Sensei Snacks [MySoy fast foods, Nippon Noodles] (Consumer goods/foodstuffs)
Yamato Restaurants (Consumer Goods/foodstuffs)
Seven Seas Oceanic Farming
Opulent Sushi (luxury restaurants)

Shiawase Biotech
Shiawase Biodrones (Drones)
Shiawase Cybernetics [Shiawase Vector]
Shiawase Laboratories [Vasocon] (Biotech/Genetech)
Shiawase Nanotech (Nanotecdh/Medtech)

Shiawase Energy
Shiawase Amaterasu Solar (Energy)
Shiawase Atomics (Energy)
Shiawase Fuzion (Energy)

Shiawase Envirotech
Arboritech [Terres Du Monde]
Kuroyama Geosource [Kuroyama Minerals, MegaMine] (Mining/Resource Processing)
SECCA Co-op Commercial [Agricola] (Agribusiness)
Shiawase City Services (Utilities Service Provider)
Shiawase Petrochemical

Shiawase Finanacial
Shiawase House Bank (Banking)

Shiawase Logistics
Resha Corporation [UCAS Trak] (Rail Transport)
Shiawase Cargolifting (Shipping)
Shiawase City Transports (Urban Transport)
Shiawase SeaWays (Shipping)

Shiawase Manufacturing
Shiawase Advanced Robotics
Shiawase Electronics [Kawaii Electronics Shiawase Sim Station] (Matrix/Consumer electronics)
Shiawase Fashion [Jean-Paul, Wellington Bros., Vashon Island]
Shiawase Industries [Hephaestus Technologies] (Heavy Industry, vehicles)
Shiawase Motors [Hongqisama, Protoreva, Purosu] (Automotive)
Shiawase Toys [Hello Puppy, Megatoys, Mycross Diecast]

Shiawase Mediatech
Shiawase & Rubicon Advertisement
Shiawase Simsense Studios
Shiawase Vector Matrix Services

Shiawase Market Information & Forcasting Department

Shiawase Omnicare
Reblossom Centres (Healthcare)
Shiawase Diagnostics [EuroGenetix, MyGene, Senpaitek] (Genetech, Pharmaceuticals)
Shiawase Health [Da Fang Rejuvenation Clinics, Shiawase Medical Response & Rescue]
Shiawase Welfare [Shady Pines Retirement Homes, Tengoku Enclave] (Healthcare Service Providers)

Shiawase Security Services
Desert Storm Security
Imperial Tech Services (miltech)
Kami Consulting (military consultancy)
Shiawase Armaments/Nemesis Arms (armament)

POSTED BY: BAKA DABORA

As the world's first true megacorporation, Shiawase has become heavily integrated into our daily lives, and you might not even realize just how deeply that integration runs. First and foremost, Shiawase is known for their high-quality cyberware and bioware products, which many of you may already have implanted inside of you from the times runs have gone bad. Or even from the times you simply wanted to improve yourselves to become better runners. And even if you went out of the way and bought an off-brand piece of cyberware instead, you might be surprised to find some of the components have been manufactured by Shiawase. Some of you might even have to admit that you owe your lives to Shiawase technology, thanks to the drugs they've created or the medkits they've sold over the years. This megacorporation is also well known for its high-fashion lines, including its ever-popular steampunk lines, which does billions of nuyen in sales each year and is frequently used to get us runners into places we're not supposed to be. Many of their Yamato restaurants tend to be used for meets or runner hangouts, either before, during, or after the completion of a successful run. You've also probably stopped and bought some Sensei Snacks from one of their vending machines while on a run, perhaps on one of your long-ass stakeouts.

In the shadows, Shiawase is also known to runners for its interests in the manufacturing sector, but often that is because those interests are frequently the targets of runs. Also, depending on where you live, the energy that you use to run your refrigerators or charge your commlinks may come from Shiawase. And of course, Shiawase also has the fame (or the infamy, depending on who you ask), for being the ones that fought for corporations to be recognized as extraterritorial entities that should be granted extraterritorial legal status. For years, Shiawase has been listed as the eighth largest megacorporation in the world. But slowly, Shiawase has been growing and expanding into other sectors, including the agricultural, media, and security sectors and has slowly risen in the corporate rankings as its profile among its fellow megacorporations has risen as well.

LEADERSHIP CURRENT CHALLENGES

Despite its public image, with its PR spin doctors still trying to reassure the masses and portray the megacorporation as the unshakable bedrock for the megacorporate world, Shiawase is still reeling internally from the massive aftershocks caused by both Empress Hitomi's and former CEO Korin Yamana's abrupt departures from the Shiawase board of directors in 2075. With Soko Shiawase passing away and her stock being inherited by other members on the board and with Korin Yamana selling his shares at almost the same time, the political landscape on the Shiawase board shifted dramatically, allowing for Tadashi Shiawase to rise once again to power and become Shiawase's new CEO, while Reiko Shiawase transitioned into the position of chairwoman by his side.

Once the board members assumed their new positions on the new board, their first action was the removal of Nigel Coltrane from his influential position as head of the Shiawase Market Information & Forecasting Department and replacing him with Ichiro Kiyomoto, signaling a desire to return to the old ways. As you may recall, prior to the second Matrix crash and all the fallout that came with it, Kiyomoto served as the head of that division, which happens to be Shiawase's in-house counter-intelligence unit. That position then fell to Coltrane in 2065 when the Shiawase board encountered a similar shake-up. At that time, Coltrane was rewarded for his loyal service to the "Three Orchids" on the board of directors (Empress Hitomi, Mitsuko Shiawase-Yamana, and Reiko Shiawase-Shimada). But when the Orchids' political fortunes took a turn for the worse a decade later, Coltrane found himself out in the cold politically, as Kiyomoto was once again returned to his old position by his allies on the board. For his part, Coltrane was sent into political exile for all intents and purposes, being made a junior executive at Shiawase Simsense Studios, with very little authority to do anything except stay out of the way and collect a paycheck. Coltrane was not even awarded a post similar to what he used to have before he was moved into MIFD: the head of Vector Matrix. And due to that perceived shame to his personal honor, Coltrane is believed to have lashed out repeatedly against Kiyomoto over the last three years, looking for every opportunity to shame him and weaken his position within Shiawase, with the goal of eventually regaining his powerful position. Similarly, Kiyomoto has been doing everything he could to fend off Coltrane's attacks, as well as to undermine him.

I mention this particular internal squabble because this has not been an isolated incident. Since 2075, a few thousand executives throughout Shiawase have been shifted around the corporation based on their political loyalties, with some involuntarily leaving their influential positions into forced retirements or have been demoted into less desirable roles (like Coltrane), while others, loyal to the current CEO and board chair, have been promoted into those same honored positions to replace them. As a result, since 2075, rates of seppuku have spiked by nearly eight percent among those employees that found themselves forced either out of work or into a career-ending job. These numbers have slowly been receding since 2075, but the rate of suicide from these dishonored employees is still higher than normal, and is *still* leaving behind a wide swath of positions that are either

currently sitting vacant or are being filled by less-experienced personnel, with far less institutional knowledge. This is contributing to lag time in departments and divisions, responses to the marketplace demands, and the pressures being put on them by their competition. And more importantly, there are still disgruntled employees throughout the megacorporation at all levels looking for payback against those who replaced them. This situation will prove to be a great challenge moving forward for the board, with them trying to get things back on track internally for Shiawase to be able to keep competing against its rivals in the global marketplace while being able to find ways of appeasing the malcontents.

- Geez. Coltrane and Kiyomoto again? Isn't the board getting tired of their antics? Their petty squabbling has to be costing Shiawase serious nuyen, not to mention serving as a major distraction. Seems to me they're putting their personal vendettas above the good of the company. And with an internal corporate culture as important to Shiawase employees as almost life itself, you would think this would be major faux pas that would not be tolerated.
- Slamm-0!

- It won't be from here on out. From what I'm hearing, the board is investing hundreds of millions of nuyen to overhaul the MIFD. They are starting out with upgrading their physical assets, ranging from improving their computer systems to investing in brand-new methods of encryption and intrusion countermeasures, investing in better 'ware for their covert agents and investing in the development of new, bleeding-edge malware for intrusion purposes. Along with these improvements, the board is increasing the size of MIFD by twenty-five percent and moving new blood into the MIFD; new workers who are better connected to latest trends in the younger generations of corporate workers, and who are more capable to adapt to changing times (and able to compete with rivals such as Horizon). In short, they are adding to the old guard and are making the MIFD big enough that it is practically impossible for the entire division to be loyal to just two men. And in doing so, they are putting both these men on notice that the MIFD will no longer be their personal playground. Kiyomoto is keeping his job for now, despite Coltrane's latest efforts to discredit him, but if these two men can't find some honorable means to settle their rivalry, the Board of Directors will eliminate both of them permanently. This would send a clear and decisive message to the entire corporation to stop focusing on their petty rivalries and direct their energies to helping Shiawase succeed, lest they suffer the same fate. It wouldn't stop all the in-fighting, but it could help cut down on the problem.
- Kay St. Irregular

- Providing the conservatives on that board allow it to happen. Don't get me wrong, realigning the MIFD priorities from serving these two men to protecting the greater interests of Shiawase is the right thing to do, but for people like Tadashi, traditions come first. And this will be a difficult thing for him to sanction. This could turn out to be another empty threat and could make the problems in the Shiawase corporate culture that much worse.
- Netcat

- Already at the start of this overhaul, I'm hearing that there are three new transfers into the MIFD eager to make a strong impression on the board, and to potentially snatch this position from both Ichiro Kiyomoto and Nigel Coltrane: Kyo Goto, Masanori Sakamoto, and Ren Nishimura. Unlike either Coltrane or Kiyomoto, these three Shiawase workers seem to want to earn the position by excelling in their own positions, instead of doing what they can to undermine their competition. What a novel concept—proving your actual worth, instead of tearing down your competition.
- Kia

- But for a conservative Japanese corp like Shiawase, it's a rather novel concept. Conservative Japanese traditions value workers with vast experience, a history of loyalty, and wisdom. That means advancement through Shiawase's ranks was usually automatic and practically guaranteed the more years you put in. Once the Yamana Doctrine was introduced by the previous board, concepts like proving your merit based on performance and qualifications were introduced into the corporate culture, allowing younger workers to be able to advance into previously occupied positions where they might be more effective than the current sitting manger or executive, who could use restorative genetic techniques to stay in that position for practically forever. And trust me—this doctrine has done nothing but sparked controversy and disdain from the conservative elements, which Tadashi represents. With the Shinto Advisory Board gaining stocks as well, there's going to be an ongoing push to have this doctrine thrown out. Who knows what will happen to Shiawase then if it does. But for my guess, it will mean more stagnation, like there was before the reforms.
- Kay St. Irregular

- Fortunately for Shiawase, even if the doctrine is thrown out, you'll still have executives leery of using restorative therapies due to the prominent spread of the CFD virus. Shiawase Biotech departments may not have been hit as hard as Evo, or NeoNET, but there is still a real possibility of contracting the disease from these treatments. The culture seems to be going back to the notion of accepting an honorable retirement rather than risking becoming a head case and drastically altering what life you have left. There is a growing acknowledgement that sometimes the risk just isn't worth it. That adjustment may add credence to the board's belief that this doctrine is no longer necessary.
- Glitch

- I don't see the doctrine being thrown out, at least not entirely. It's gotten results, which lots of board members like. Plus, Reiko is still there openly supporting the document, and Hitomi still has a presence in the boardroom, albeit through a proxy vote. Between Reiko and Hitomi, that's still a formidable voting block to overcome, even for Tadashi.
- Kay St. Irregular

- Isn't Kiyomoto protected already, and not just from the existing cultural norms there in Shiawase? The last I heard he was an item with Reiko. To me, that screams job security.
- Cosmo

- They used to be. Interestingly enough, a few years ago, Kiyomoto had his own start-up corporation called Tenjin Information Services. It was a fairly successful company for a single A corporation, one that was separate from Shiawase. However, this independent corporation got the attention of Reiko, and long story short, the start-up was eventually sold to Shiawase and folded into Shiawase Vector Matrix Services. And a month or so after that, Reiko and Kiyomoto split up. Interesting coincidence, wouldn't you say?
- Baka Dabora

- That's cold, even for one of the Three Orchids.
- Slamm-0!

- So what's going to become of the Neo-Genyosha group that Kiyomoto allegedly started? Is it still going to continue on under this new board?
- Snopes

- The Neo-Genyosha has officially been ordered to be disbanded, and if anyone within Shiawase is found to be still operating for this secret cabal of Kiyomoto's after this edict has been issued, there will be dire consequences for these defiant employees. But as everyone knows, it is extremely difficult to root out everyone associated with a secret organization, especially when the person responsible for it is still in power. Just think about the Black Lodge for a moment. And if the rumors are true, and there is a long lineage with this group that goes back to the original Genyosha, there's a very good chance they're not going anywhere. This particular edict of the boards will prove to not be worth the electronic paper that it is published on.
- Thorn

- So did Korin Yamana get what he wanted? Did he get the "happily ever after" that he was looking for in his farewell speech in '75? The whole "retiring and starting a new family" shtick?
- Lyran

- If you mean ending up divorced, losing his influence in the Imperial Japanese State, and only holding onto roughly a quarter of the wealth he once possessed as the CEO of Shiawase, then yeah, I'd say he got what was coming to him.
- Ma'fan

- I wouldn't be crying any tears over Yamana's misfortune. He may not have the fortune he once had, but even a quarter of his wealth still amounts to a "meager" five billion nuyen. That can buy a lot of comfort for one's crappy life. I wish I had his problems.
- Hard Exit

This shift in power at the top of Shiawase led to other long-term consequences for the megacorp, including a growing number of extractions by disenfranchised employees to other corporations, with the largest defections going to Saeder-Krupp (and to a lesser extent, MCT and Renraku). Saeder-Krupp has been subtly going after Shiawase in the Asian markets in the agricultural sector for a few years now. Some of the heaviest extractions of disgruntled Shiawase employees have come from the Shiawase Envirotech division, with Saeder-Krupp allegedly obtaining dozens of mid-level Shiawase executives from their SECCA Co-op Commercial subsidiary. But perhaps the biggest blow to Shiawase came from the extraction of high-profile executive Isabelle Corbeau, the former director of Shiawase Biofood, who had been demoted to being a paper-pushing, low-level executive of Sensei Snacks in late 2075 as punishment for her loyalty to the old guard, with a salary less than a quarter of what she was making before.

- I know there is confusion out there between biofood and envirotech divisions, and many are wondering why Corbeau would be targeted, instead of someone from Envirotech. Let me clear things up for you. Arboritech and Secca Co-op subsidiaries (under Envirotech) handle the growth and production of crops for Shiawase, as well as the distribution of the food commodities. The only interaction biofood has with envirotech is that they (specifically their Shiawase Laboratories subsidiary) are the ones that genetically modify the crops and livestock to make them more disease resistant and improve their quality. Corbeau would have much of the paydata that S-K would desire when it comes to these genetic modifications, both as to how to improve their crops and livestock, as well as to tamper with Shiawase's products. This is why Shiawase is so desperate to get Corbeau back, as she potentially possesses the key to killing one of their major cash cows (no pun intended).
- The Smiling Bandit

In early 2076, Corbeau disappeared from her Shiawase-furnished loft, and at that time, the MIFD suspected an extraction and came to the conclusion that S-K was behind it. Originally, Saeder-Krupp denied Shiawase's allegations, and denied knowing anything about her whereabouts. But when evidence came to light in early 2077 proving that Corbeau was residing in a S-K-owned arcology in Rhine-Ruhr, Shiawase went ballistic, accusing Corbeau of stealing proprietary information and corporate espionage, and demanding Corbeau's extradition for various criminal charges. Saeder-Krupp then claimed that Corbeau actively sought political asylum, and even filed for citizenship with S-K, both of which were granted to her. Shiawase has not allowed this matter to settle, and instead has filed a lawsuit with the Corporate Court asking them to force Saeder-Krupp to extradite Corbeau or face sanctions, up to and including an Omega order. It is clear Shiawase wants her back, and they have been waiting for a decision from the Corporate Court on this matter. But with the Court and most of its resources preoccupied by this corporate audit of the AA corporations, it could still be some time yet before a decision in this case is rendered. However, there is a standing bounty of 250,000 nuyen for the return of Corbeau (alive) to Shiawase in the shadows, so out of all the waves of defecting employees, she seems like the one that Shiawase is the most desperate to get back.

- Corbeau's defection is not the only major problem Tadashi Shiawase has to deal with relating to personnel matters. There is the matter of Mamoru's son, Kazuja. In 2074, he was appointed as the head of the Biotech division. Since that time, Kazuja has done nothing more than to make bold promises about things he's wanted to accomplish within the biotech division, only to allow those priorities to lapse months and years later. Since 2074, Kazuja's proven himself incompetent as a manager, surviving on a reputation that for all intents and purposes was established by the person he replaced. There have been private accusations of mismanagement, improper expenses reporting and outrageous wasteful spending from Kazuja, and yet Tadashi hasn't done anything about it. In fact, rumor has it that Tadashi has allowed the past successes of the biotech division to provide cover for Kazuja's misdeeds. And in the light of CFD, the biotech division has been inconsistent with its reaction to it, thanks in part to Kazuja's poor management, making it difficult for the division to gain ground against this scare. I've heard a lot whispers coming from the biotech division saying they want Kazuja gone, but so far Tadashi has been blocking those efforts.
- The Smiling Bandit

- For Tadashi, if he was to allow anything to happen to Kazuja, it would bring great shame to the Shiawase family name. It would also validate the Yomana Doctrine and why it is necessary, something he desperately does not want to see happen. And so, from the looks of things, Tadashi has been using the shadows to make Kazuja look more competent than what he really is to prop him up with the board, arranging such jobs as tracking down tainted products and replacing them with clean product in the street clinics, extracting key personnel from rival corporations to add to Shiawase's already world-renowned talent, and even continuing to sabotage the products of the competition, to make Shiawase's products look even more desirable. And from how well Shiawase Biotech still dominates the field of genetech and nanotech, this approach seems to be working ... for now. But if Kazuja remains the head of biotech division for much longer, this house of cards could collapse.
- Kia

- There's been a proposal to the board to put Kazuja on permanent leave, allowing him to collect his full salary while his subordinates actually run the division, but that won't happen. He sees it as a personal affront to his honor, and Tadashi simply won't enforce it. His last name is what got him to that position. So there seems to be only one long-term solution to take care of this problem: an "accident." I do hear that Kazuja has a bit of a BTL addiction, so an overdose seems likely in his future.
- Clockwork

- There are other bounties from Shiawase relating to these errant employees, though most are not as high as Corbeau's (usually ranging between 5,000 and 15,000 nuyen per employee). Many of the jobs can be found on ShadowSEA, but check with your fixer in case you need to know more about these jobs, the etiquette you will need to use to approach a Shiawase Johnson, and all the details that these jobs will entail. Most are extraction jobs, but a few involve wetwork.
- Kia

On top of these other matters facing Shiawase and its leadership, there is also the matter of Empress Hitomi. In 2075, after going into labor at Shiawase's annual shareholder meeting and experiencing what was then described as a difficult birth, Hitomi eventually came to the conclusion that she needed to step down as chair for the good of her family and her newborn child. At the time, most saw this choice as a wise decision; and more importantly, they saw it as a voluntary one. But in the months that followed, Hitomi's demeanor toward Shiawase changed, going from warm to icy. Agreements for contracts within the Japanese Imperial State that once were assumed to be safely in Shiawase's control have gone to their AAA competitors instead—namely to Mitsuhama and Renraku, and to a lesser extent, AA corporations such as Yakashima. There haven't been a large number of contracts that have changed hands, but there have been enough significant contracts here and there since 2075 that have raised eyebrows within the Japanese Imperial State, from multi-million nuyen contracts changing hands from Desert Storm Security to Yakasima's Sakura Security and going from Vector Matrix systems to Tetradyne Matrix Systems to suggest that Tadashi Shiawase and his corporation may have slipped in favor with the Empress. When asked about the changes, Empress Hitomi has dismissed any allegations that the changes were due to personal reasons, saying that instead they were what was in the best interests of the imperial state, or the changes stemmed from recommendations made by the Shinto clergy. Although it is true that the empire is heavily influenced by Shinto traditions and customs, Hitomi herself has chosen from time to time to not be swayed by recommendations made by the Shinto priesthood. This fact has only given credence to the belief that a new feud may be forming in private between Hitomi and Tadashi Shiawase, one that may put Shiawase at odds with the Japanese Imperial State. This could even threaten the perceived alliance between the Japanese corporations outside of Japan, if Shiawase starts to look more like a political pariah inside Japan and starts to look vulnerable. So far, Tadashi seems not to have done much about it, and perhaps he is choosing to ignore it for the time being, afraid that Hitomi may be trying to bait him into doing something foolish, which ultimately would weaken his position on the board. And he has fought too hard over the past decade to lose his standing in Shiawase again, so don't be surprised if Tadashi chooses to err on the side of caution from taking on Japan's most popular political figure.

- A new feud? I doubt that. I don't think the feud between Hitomi and Tadashi ever ended from the time she had him stripped of power in 2065. If anything, this is merely a continuation of that original feud. But yes, I do agree, that this seems to support the idea that Hitomi's exit from the board was anything but voluntary. So the questions become: What is she hiding that's given someone like Tadashi leverage over her, and do any of the Matrix conspiracy theories contain any truth to them as to why she really stepped down?
- Kia

- Yes.
- Plan 9

- And another good question would be: Why aren't they using that leverage now to keep Hitomi from using her position as Empress to get back at Tadashi?
- Snopes

Following the distribution of Soko's stock, Tadashi and Reiko were not the only ones to increase their political power within the corporation. The Shinto Advisory Board acquired a tremendous amount of stock from the sale of Yamana's stock. In 2078, the head of the Shinto Advisory Board is a Shinto priest named Naohiko Kimura. Fifty-nine years old, Kimura is considered one of the most conservative Shinto priests within Shiawase Japan. Some would even consider him to be a supporter of some of the more radical sects of the Shinto religion. It has been rumored Kimura has privately criticized Tadashi and Reiko for not being traditional enough, and has grumbled (again, in private) that these two have not done enough to eliminate the abomination known as the Yamana Doctrine. In public, Kimura has espoused sentiments that undoubtedly have started to cause the board all sorts of headaches, especially since he is perceived to be speaking from the Shiawase kami itself, and it puts the board in a precarious position of having to oppose the kami. Kimura's more controversial stances started to reveal themselves when the existence of the CFD virus became widely known. Having never been a fan of "soulless," "unnatural" artificial intelligences, Kimura had no problems coming down hard on the CFD outbreak, stating that the nanovirus threatens the individual soul and is a risk for harming kamis, even to the point of theorizing that head cases, when they die, could end up disrupting and corrupting the kamis. As the CFD outbreak worsened, Kimura's rhetoric has only grown harsher, demanding Shiawase at the very least accept accountability for contributing to the spread of this unnatural disease by demanding their genetic and nanotech divisions be shuttered, and the resources be devoted to more "natural" alternatives, from their agricultural subsidiaries in their Evirotech division and to wind and solar energy production with their Shiawase Amaterasu Solar subsidiary. He has even gone on an environmental rant, advising the board to consider stopping the development of more nuclear energy plants within Shiawase Atomics, and converting their assets to renewable resources such as solar and wind energy (and giving more power to Shiawase Amaterasu Solar, which

SHIAWASE LEXICON

Shiawase Johnsons have particular phrases and terminology that distinguish themselves from the other Mr. Johnsons. The following definitions will help you relate to a Shiawase Mr. Johnson and improve your chances for getting that job:

-Hikoku, -Yogisha: Typical suffixes applied to shadowrunners. –Hikoku refers to a defendant, whereas –yogisha refers to a suspect. Either are considered applicable when addressing shadowrunners.

Burakumin: Burakumin is another term for shadowrunners, but one that most runners would not want to hear. The term refers to an outcast community or a community that is frequently discriminated against. This term is not one of respect, and as such, most see this as a Johnson's perception that the runner team is expendable. Teams that are referred to with this term should be on the look-out for highly dangerous jobs they may not be walking away from (i.e., suicide jobs) or jobs where Mr. Johnson may double-cross them for knowing too much after the job.

Meishi: A business card. This tradition may seem odd in the digital age, but Shiawase Johnsons still prefer receiving your contact information via a physical business card. You're not a permanent employee with Shiawase, so Mr. Johnson expects your meishi to be very simple. Name and commcode and that's it. Inside Shiawase, the etiquette of the meishi has been taken to an art form, but for runners, plain and simple is what works. Make sure business cards are at least printed; Shiawase Mr. Johnsons still frown on handwritten business cards, and some may take handwritten business cards as an insult.

Shiawase Damashii: This is the philosophy/norms/rules that govern all of Shiawase culture. It instructs people inside Shiawase how they should act, from instructing them on the need for respect to the need to apologize when a mistake is made. It also can be informative to runners as to how to conduct themselves at the meet and deal with their Johnsons (who prefer to be called Naka-udo-san, or "professional go-between"). It also informs runners that Shiawase Johnsons prefer to do business in their native language, Japanese.

Sokaiya: A particular type of run limited usually to Japanese corps. Shiawase in particular engages in many of these types of runs. Sokaiya runs are meant to embarrass the high-level executives and board members of a rival corporation, usually done through interrupting board meetings or causing disruptions centered around major events, bringing shame to those in power.

happens to be a subsidiary Kimura is heavily invested in). If Kimura gets what he wants and forces a shifting of Shiawase's priorities, it will definitely harm Shiawase's brand in the long term, and the board knows it. Moving away from the things that Shiawase is known for globally could conceivably cost Shiawase hundreds of billions of nuyen as well as the loss of their new stature within the megacororpate ranks. For many on the board, Kimura's agenda is one that is not in Shiawase's best interests, but because of his high profile status within the Shinto religious community, they acknowledge that Kimura is protected and won't be going anywhere anytime soon.

- This religious figure, Kimura, is dangerous. He's become the latest high-profile Shinto priest calling for re-opening Yomi Island, specifically to contain head cases. Given the island's troubled past with metahumans, this is certainly not how we want to see victims of CFD treated. Unfortunately, combining Kimura's charisma with the amount of Shiawase shares he controls makes him well-positioned to get at least some of his ideas implemented. It also doesn't hurt the cause when there are others from within Mitsuhama, Renraku, and the greater Shinto community calling for the very same thing. With political pressure building from the religious community, the Emperor may have no choice but to give into those demands and bring back the internment prison of Yomi Island.
- Mika

MAJOR DIVISIONS TO WATCH IN 2078 AND BEYOND

SHIAWASE BIOFOOD

For a period of time after 2075, Shiawase's abrupt change in leadership resulted in declines in both market shares and profit margins, with the markets reacting negatively to the uncertainty the changes brought. They also reacted as other megacorporations took advantage of Shiawase's internal adjustments, leading to profits dipping nearly nine percent from the middle of 2075 to the middle of 2076. The exception to this steep drop in profits for Shiawase was their investments in the agricultural sector, and the tremendous profits they have been reaping from their rice, soy, wheat, krill and mycoprotein futures. At the end of 2075, Shiawase made an addition 105 billion nuyen worldwide from the sale of their food products alone. Much of this was a result of the devastation the Aztlan-Amazonia war had on Aztechnology's food-production infrastructure, particularly with the destruction of NatVat facilities, which Shiawase was all too happy to exploit. And since

that time, Shiawase and its Marketing Information and Forecasting Department has been using the shadows to sabotage Aztechnology's recovery, hit Horizon's agricultural facilities, and delay the release of their food products onto their market so that Shiawase can keep food prices high and reap big profits. That's also the reason Saeder-Krupp is going after Shiawase in the Asian sectors, to muscle in on the profits. From my experience, these jobs to sabotage Azechnology and Horizon, while also fending off the advances of Saeder-Krupp in Asia, pay very well, and right now, you can find them in abundance. You can usually make upwards of 25,000 nuyen per job. But keep in mind there is high pressure put on runners to succeed in these types of jobs as well. Given how much nuyen Shiawase is raking in, screw up a job and you could guarantee yourselves an enemy of Mr. Johnson. And given how much nuyen is on the line for each corporation, these jobs are seeing the most danger—and the most resistance. But so far, the jobs appear to be working (along with ongoing droughts and famine to make food products scarce in many parts of the world), and Shiawase continues to see record profits from the agricultural sector, as commodity prices continue to soar.

In addition to manipulating food prices and sabotaging its competition, Shiawase has strategically expanded locations of Sensei Snacks vending machines, adding up to twenty-five percent more locations, specifically in North America, South America, and Europe. If it feels like you can't go three blocks without stumbling upon a Sensei Snacks vending machine, this is why. With food shortages still very real in many parts of the world, Shiawase often has a difficult time keeping these machines stocked. Shiawase's Yamato Restaurants have seen a sixty-percent increase in profits, recently opening new locations in Seattle, Denver, Salt Lake City, Miami, Manhattan, and DeeCee. Shiawase Biofood has also invested in sea farming and harvesting, starting up new subsidiary called Seven Seas Oceanic Farming. With its genetic knowledge and laboratories, Shiawase has mapped out the genomes of many sea creatures, and they continue to clone many of the species for their restaurant chains, including a luxury restaurant chain they recently opened in the last year: Opulent Sushi. Opulent Sushi can only be found in the Japanese Imperial State, but its popularity is rising, particularly in the corporate sector, as only those that possess corporate SINs may dine there. These new restaurants cater to the corporate elite; you will not find runner meets taking place in the backrooms. Even the workers themselves have to have corporate SINs to be employed there. Opulent Sushi restaurants work hard to keep out the riff-raff, and I expect their popularity to expand further into the Asian markets in the coming years.

The new person who replaced Isabelle Corbeau in 2076 is a man named Dominique Joanis, an executive who has been with Shiawase Biofood for eighteen years. So far, Joanis is receiving praise for how he is handling Biofood, as profits from this division continue to climb and impress. For as long as Shiawase can continue to manipulate the food markets and keep food prices high, Joanis should have nothing to fear about his job security.

- Joanis is one of those potential Mr. Johnsons to look out for. He's been known for using the Burakumin term a little too frequently around his runner teams. And from what I hear, out of the last eight teams he hired, only two of them came back from their jobs, and those teams suffered heavy losses. Joanis is not a man who knows how to play nicely with his toys.
- Netcat

SHIAWASE BIOTECH

Shiawase Biotech has been in the news a lot lately because of the CFD outbreak. With Shiawase being a leading pioneer and trailblazer in the fields of nanotech and genetech, there were many high expectations placed on the corp. Many assumed Shiawase would find a treatment for this disease relatively quickly thanks to its armies of world-renowned researchers, specialists, facilities and bleeding-edge tech. The fact that Shiawase brings in over two trillion dollars annually from the sale and implantation of cyberware, bioware, nanotech, and genetech has only reinforced Shiawase's reputation for being years ahead of the other megacorporations in these fields, with many celebrities, politicians, and military figures choosing their products over their rivals. Yet to date, no quick-and-easy solution has been forthcoming from Shiawase. Kazuja Shiawase continues to assure the public that a cure will be forthcoming from his division, but years later, each passing month only brings with it disappointment.

One of Kazuja's biggest failings has been in managing the public's expectations and not communicating just how complex the CFD situation really is. Because of this, infighting has increased behind the scenes, with pressures mounting from the Emperor and Empress to find a solution—one that does not require having to reopen Yomi Island. All other Japanacorps are racing to provide that solution and garner the prestige of being the ones to save the Japanese Imperial State. Unfortunately, instead of leading the charge to the solution, Shiawase has melted in with the rest of the crowd, lacking focus and not doing anything to grab the attention that they should receive based on their reputation. Without its leadership, many have started to wonder where a cure will come from and have begun questioning their once-unshakable faith in Shiawase and its products. In the future, this will prove invaluable to Shiawase's competitors, while at the same time proving detrimental to Shiawase Biotech.

Kazuja has also tried to reassure the Japanese Imperial State and the rest of the world that Shiawase products are safe, with one of the lowest rates of

infection for CFD in the world (which appears to be true). But that doesn't help the public when their neighbors or friends start showing signs of the disease, particularly in overcrowded sections of Japan. It also has not helped that Shiawase Biotech delayed or cancelled the release of nearly a dozen new types of nanites and genetic treatments out of the fear that the market is too shaky right now, and any release of new tech is bound to lose money no matter what. Many have taken this as a sign that Shiawase has no confidence in its own products, instead of the real reason: The timing of such releases often makes or a breaks a new product. Insiders within the Shiawase Biotech division have also expressed frustration that they have not been able to capture much of the consumer confidence lost in the whole affair. Stolen internal documents from Shiawase board meetings have revealed the board has expected the biotech division to have expanded its profits by at least seventy-five percent due to the problems the other megacorporations have been encountering with the CFD virus infiltrating their products. Instead, Kazuja has only managed to increase profits by a meager six percent, far less than what the board was expecting (which, for your information, was closer to either a twenty or thirty percent increase in market share).

- Kazuja must be feeling the pressure. Extractions of anyone rumored to be a head case are up by sixty percent within Shiawase—he wants them out so there are no associations of the corp with the virus. Shiawase researchers dealing specifically with the CFD virus are putting in longer hours. Vacations in many cases are being cancelled. I'd imagine solving the problem with the CFD virus is the biotech division's number-one priority, and if Kazuja isn't able to deliver on this priority, the board will find some way to remove Kazuja. This incompetence can't be allowed to fester forever, lest Shiawase lose face over its CFD failures.
- Pistons

- Kazuja isn't that incompetent. He is very knowledgeable in the field of genetics. He's been published in academia about two dozen times. His articles have received much acclaim and recognition over the years, winning three prestigious awards. He's just isn't a good manager. Perhaps that's why the board hesitates to do anything about him—the last thing they would want is for him to pull a Corbeau and defect to somewhere else, taking the Shiawase name with him.
- Glitch

- That would never happen. The culture that Kazuja lives in, he would be more likely to take his own life before disgracing his family like that.
- Kia

- To be fair, Kazuja and his team has tried to develop treatments for six specific major strains of the CFD virus. And in a majority of their test subjects, they have seen tremendous improvements with their conditions, with only a few lingering side-effects such as memory lapses, migraine headaches and partial amnesia. For many, they can live with those side effects. However, in ten percent of the cases that tried the procedure, the virus essentially mutated, reacting to the treatment by corrupting even further into new, alien personalities. Once that mutation happened, Shiawase has no way to deal with the new personalities. The mutated virus also seemed much more powerful. Those affected with these new twisted personalities were completely overwritten in a matter of days. And these personalities turned out to be far worse than what was present before, irrational and prone to extreme violence in the best-case scenarios, sadistic and homicidal in the worst. I know almost all drugs and treatments come with potential side effects, but this is one hell of a risk. And one that may cause these solutions to actually lose money for Shiawase. People will be too scared to try these potential solutions, and it will take a lot for Shiawase to make up for the hundreds of millions of nuyen they have already invested in creating these treatments. So unless Shiawase is able to convince the general public to use it, you probably won't see a huge jump in profits for Shiawase Biotech.
- The Smiling Bandit

- There may be another family feud brewing within Shiawase ranks, and from what I'm hearing, it could be between Kazuja and Mamoru. Mamoru was instrumental in getting Kazuja promoted to head of the biotech division, and unfortunately, Kazuja is proving to be a disappointment. This is bringing shame to Mamoru and his personal honor, something that he is growing tired of. And for Kazuja, he's getting pissed off that he's unable to outshine his father and the growth the envirotech division is enjoying, despite what he considers to be his best efforts. From what I'm hearing, there is potential for runs between the biotech and the envirotech divisions, with biotech looking to hinder envirotech so that the biotech division does not look as bad when compared to the other, while envirotech is looking to give the board reason to finally act and do something about Kazuja. The shame of Kazuja getting terminated would prove to be an embarrassment and hurt in the short term, but as least it would not be as bad if it persisted for years or decades.
- Sunshine

- It wouldn't surprise me if Kazuja doesn't get intel on the envirotech division and leak that information to S-K or Yakashima. S-K intelligence and Yakashima have been engaging in a charm offensive against him for some time, and if they can't get him to leak classified materials on his own division, at the very least they could get him to leak information from his father's division and let them do the dirty work for him. They seem to sense Kazuja's frustrations with how his own division is performing, as well as his frustration with his father's division's success, and they fully intend to manipulate it. The question is, how far have they gotten with Kazuja, and has he started leaking information to them?
- Thorn

SHIAWASE ENVIROTECH

Shiawase Envirotech is another high profile division with tremendous growth potential. Mamoru Shiawase continues to run this division as efficiently as ever. Mamoru has been receiving heaps of praise for the explosive growth in his division, with profits exceeding their highest expectations. Envirotech has been busy lately, acquiring large amounts of land to expand its agricultural businesses, particularly in Asia. Shiawase is currently focusing on acquiring real estate in Gansu (specifically inside the Hexi Corridor for livestock production and wheat, barley, and corn production), Southern Tibet (for wheat, chilies, rice, and production crops) and Sichuan provinces (for not only rice, wheat, and soy, but also for luxury commodities such as citrus fruits, sugar cane, and peaches). In its current expansion efforts, Shiawase Envirotech has been encountering stiff interference from Saeder-Krupp, with S-K doing everything it can to make procurement of these swatches of land difficult. In many cases, Saeder-Krupp has bought off local officials, forcing Envirotech to go through intense legal hoops to be able to acquire the land they seek for their agricultural production and delaying their efforts to expand, while making them much costlier. In other property acquisitions, Saeder-Krupp has initiated intense bidding wars against Shiawase, acquiring a quarter of the property that Shiawase desired while raising the price for the property Shiawase ended up

acquiring by at least one hundred percent. Even then, when Shiawase started developing the lands they acquired, they frequently found that agricultural crops or livestock introduced to those properties suddenly became plagued by disease or outbreaks of crop-ruining insects—insects that just happen to be resistant to techniques Shiawase Envirotech uses to protect their crops and livestock. The Shiawase Marketing Information and Forecasting Department has determined that many of these insects and diseases have been deliberately introduced into the eco-system, and that they have been genetically engineered to either make Shiawase's defenses completely ineffective, or at the very least limit their usefulness. Many suspect recent personnel extractions from Envirotech have resulted in the growth of these insects and diseases that specifically target the genetic profiles of Shiawase commodities. But perhaps more troubling is the fact that in recent weeks, Saeder-Krupp has been beating Shiawase to the punch and purchasing lands that Shiawase was considering but not yet ready to make an offer for. Such maneuvering seems to suggest S-K has access to inside information within Shiawase, and that information continues to be available to them. If something is not done soon to discourage S-K in its efforts to sabotage Shiawase in Asia, profits for Envirotech may very well take a serious and lasting hit, blemishing Mamoru's otherwise impeccable reputation as managing director.

Mamoru also has another problem to contend with. Kazuja Shiawase from Shiawase Biotech is making the argument that Arboritech and SECCA Co-op subsidiaries should be realigned and moved under the biotech division. The argument Kazuja seems to be making is that Biotech's Shiawase Laboratories is heavily involved in the genetic modifications made to crops and livestock, so much so that it would reduce bureaucracy if these two subsidiaries were moved under the Shiawase Biotech umbrella. Given these two subsidiaries are among the most profitable divisions of Shiawase, Mamoru is not willing to give them up. Instead, he has promised to expand the genetic laboratories of both Arboritech and SECCA Co-op so they become less dependent on Biotech, likely to the point of freezing out Biotech completely. And from rumors I have heard, Shiawase Biofood is also making the argument that these agriculture-based subsidiaries fit better under its banner to keep all food-related subsidiaries together under one division, from production to distribution. This will be a feud to watch out for in the future, as its outcome could determine the future of three of Shiawase's most powerful executives and the landscape of Shiawase divisions for decades to come.

- Kazuja has a lot to prove within his own division before the board is going to bestow even more responsibilities on him. I'm not going to say it's not possible, as crazier things have happened, I'm just saying it's going to take a lot (and a lot of runs) to make it happen for him. I would say Biofood has the edge in any arguments for realignment, and Mamoru should be the most concerned about them.
- Glitch

SHIAWASE MANUFACTURING

While most eyes have been drawn to either Shiawase Biotech or Shiawase Envirotech, Shiawase Manufacturing continues to be a major component of the megacorp. From heavy industry and fashion to vehicles, Shiawase Manufacturing brings in over a trillion nuyen for the corporation each year. The new managing director for Shiawase Manufacturing is Quinn Browne, who replaced Patrick Bösherz when he was forced into retirement following the board shake-up in 2075. Since taking over, Browne has seen growth in the robotics, electronics, and fashion sectors, with profits increasing anywhere between five and twenty-two percent. Although the fashion lines have shown respectable growth, Shiawase's Vashon Island and Wellington Bros. are seeing stronger competition from the likes of Victory, Zoé, and even Armanté. So even though Vashon Island reported a profit increase of five percent in the last quarter, many experts expect Vashon Island and Wellington Bros to report a loss for the first time in over a decade next quarter, and the pressure is on for this department to find new ways of being innovative and fresh.

Shiawase Industry has seen a tremendous rise in profitability since the Great Dragon Civil War, and the aftermath left many of Saeder-Krupp's industrial subsidiaries weakened. Shiawase has been all too happy to use Hephaestus Technologies to get back at S-K for its interference in its Envirotech division by stealing its construction contracts and clientele in the industrial sector. Profits for Shiawase Industry have risen by twnety percent in the last three years. In between the weaker-than-expected Shiawase Fashion department and the expanding Shiawase Industries lies a multitude of other divisions, including Shiawase Motors, Shiawase Toys, and Shiawase Electronics. Many of these subsidiaries have been targets for sabotage, paydata theft, and extractions over the years, and they will continue to be targets due to their continued strong success. Shiawase Electronics, for example, is set to announce a new version of their popular Sim Station gaming system. And Shiawase Toys is set to announce a new simsense movie deal to turn out a whole linked series of blockbuster flicks. There is plenty of things happening with Shiawase Manufacturing, and lots of opportunities for future jobs for shadowrunners.

CURRENT SHIAWASE DIVISIONS AND MANAGERS (2078)

Division	Headquarters	Managing Director
Shiawase Corporation	Osaka, Japan	Tadashi Shiawase
Shiawase Biofood	Lille, France	Dominique Joanis
Shiawase Biotech	Neo-Tokyo, Japan	Kazuja Shiawase
Shiawase Energy	Washington FDC, UCAS	Jennifer Lawson
Shiawase Envirotech	Osaka, Japan	Mamoru Shiawase
Shiawase Financial	Neo-Tokyo, Japan	Takeshi Matsukawa
Shiawase Logistics	Osaka, Japan	Naomasa Matsuda
Shiawase Manufacturing	Brussels, EC	Quinn Browne
Shiawase Marketing Information & Forecasting Department	Osaka, Japan	Ichiro Kiyomoto
Shiawase Mediatech	Calcutta, Indian Union	Farrokh Shankar
Shiawase Omnicare	Manila, Philippines	Orino Murakami
Shiawase Security Services	Tallinn, Estonia	Kiyotaka Hayashi

WUXING

There are lines of power that crisscross the globe. Certain people have the gift for building them, using them, nudging them. The very best of them go to one place. They are hired by Wuxing as a sign that they have made it. They are at the top of their particular profession. They have nothing but glamor and high-profile assignments waiting for them going forward.

Or they have to sit in a back room conjuring the same illusion, over and over.

Lin Mae had pushed against it at first, trying to explain to Ms. Hong that there was no need for her to be the only person casting this particular illusion, confined to her room.

"It's not that difficult of an illusion, really," she had said. "There are so many 3D images to use, anyone can make an excellent image. I think, in all humility, that I do a fine job with my particular version of the image, but that is not to say that one of our many other skilled personnel could not do the job roughly as well."

"If you were as wise as you were skilled, you would know that creating the image is only a small reason we need a particular set of skills," Ms. Wong said in a voice like a sword perpetually unsheathing. "The ability to mask what you are doing is at least as important. The fact that you do not immediately understand this helps show why you need to do your part without question and let those of us who are in charge, stay in charge. Now, your skills will be needed for the evening tridcast, but for the morning there will be more public exposure, so we will have to go with something more substantial."

Back then, before she knew better, Lin had been excited about the prospect of a morning off. But she had learned what downtime was for her—seclusion in a small back room of a luxury penthouse. Just meters away from her were trappings of wealth beyond what she could imagine—and she was not exactly poor. But she was destined to stay in the back, out of sight, all the time. No public exposure, no interactions with anyone outside of her team. She had spoken to the same four people, and only the same four people, for more than half a year. Ms. Wong called those people her team. Lin thought of them as her jailers. Lin was paid well, but the pay was not enough. The threat of disappearing forever—the type of threat Ms. Wong was capable of delivering with great subtlety—was what kept her in place.

So when a woman in a serving maid's dress stumbled back into her quarters, Lin was startled, then angry, then afraid. She couldn't talk to this woman, even though her appearance could not be considered Lin's fault. It would be a breach, and Ms. Wong hated breaches.

Oddly enough, she couldn't speak if she wanted to. Something was holding her in place. Something ... drek.

The spirit of air materialized around her, probably just to show off. The maid tilted her head and looked at Lin.

"Sorry for the spirt," she said. "You probably should have been watching for that sort of thing. But I think you have some very, very valuable information. We're going to have to find some place to talk. Then I promise you'll be unbound."

Lin nodded slightly—she could do that much. The spirit moved into the air, and so did Lin. She didn't know where it was going to take her. But suddenly she didn't want to ever have to leave her nice, secure back room.

WUXING INCORPORATED

Corporate Court Ranking (2077): #6
Corporate Slogan: "We're behind everything you do."
Corporate Status: Public corporation
World Headquarters: Hong Kong Free Enterprise Enclave
President/CEO: Sharon Chang-Wu
Major Shareholders: Wu Lung-Wei, Sharon Chiang-Wu, Fu Peng, James Harper-Smythe, Lu Bao Ling

MAJOR DIVISIONS AND NOTABLE SUBSIDIARIES

Heavy Industry/Energy/Resources: Red Wheel Engineering
Matrix: Eastern Electronics
Entertainment: AA Entertainment, Jam Bo Games, Lotus Multimedia, Tiger Trideo and Simsense, Saito Studios
Finance: Albion Mutual Funds, Fidelity Mutual Insurance, Malaysian Independent Bank, Morgan and Chase Corporation, Prosperity Development Corporation, Warren Wealth Management, Wuxing Financial Services
Automotive/Vehicles/Drones: ESSY Motors
Arcane: Awakened Protection Initiatives, Ming Solutions
Medical Supplies and Services: Bach Mai Medical, Mayfair Medical Supplies Ltd.
Service Providers: Cartwright Cartage and Freight, Minh-Pao Exports, Soba Foods, Swift Wind Deliveries, Wuxing Worldwide Shipping
Prime Facilities: Hong Kong, Fuzhou, Boston, London, Addis Ababa

POSTED BY: JIMMY NO

I recently extracted a high-ranked executive who had some juicy insider information on Wuxing. Since there have been so many changes with the corp in the last few years, I figured we could all use an update. So in place of part of my payment, I had my target give me all the bits of intel that he had. What follows is what he wrote.

- Since when do you do good deeds just out of the kindness of your heart? You must have had some angle.
- Lei Kung

- Not saying I didn't. But here it is.
- Jimmy No

HISTORY

Although now a world-spanning megacorporation with offices in numerous countries, the "soul" of Wuxing was forged in the city of its birth—Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Free Enterprise Enclave as we know it today began in 2015 when the weakened government of China finally succumbed to the combined pressure of local corporations and foreign diplomats and granted the city its independence. What many do not know, or may have forgotten, is that these efforts were in no small part driven by one Wu Kuan-Lei, head of a rapidly growing shipping and finance conglomerate known as Wuxing. Although a corporate powerhouse, it was an alliance with another notable but British family, the Harper-Smythes, that allowed it to exert powerful political influence. Together these seemingly disparate families and cultures laid the foundations for a corporate empire.

- Why am I wasting my time with the ancient history lesson?
- Chainmaker

- If you're paying attention, you'll notice that those same names are on the doors of the most important offices in Wuxing today. Family tradition is a big deal in Hong Kong, and Wuxing carries that culture with it. Basically, the reason *why* you as a street punk are being sent in a run in 2078 can often be traced back to things that happened in 2015.
- Lei Kung

After their significant victory in gaining independence, the corporate heavy hitters in the city wasted no time in building monuments to their own glory. Thus, after heavy consultation with the best geomancers available, Wu constructed what has become widely recognized as the worldwide headquarters of Wuxing: the Aberdeen Skytower. At the time, many thought the location unusual due to its remoteness from the city center, but future events would show just how significant and insightful that location selection had been. Wuxing continued its meteoric expansion right through to the crash of '29. Thanks to the solid footing wily old Wu had put it in, the company was able to weather the storm and come out in a comparatively good position on the other side. However, that was to be the last milestone of the elder Wu's life. He died peacefully in 2039 at the age of 71. The corporation continues to venerate his ancestor spirit to this day, and it is easy to see why.

After a time of appropriate mourning, the big CEO chair passed to his son Wu Lung-Wei, who vowed to continue his father's last great vision. So he began the work of building a united corporate alliance against the growing hostile influence of the major Japanese corporations. In addition, he continued such solid business practices as diversification and sensible expansion, building the company into a solid AA multinational corporation within six years.

- While we're blowing sunshine up the esteemed Wu's ass, let's not forget that he *also* built his corporation using many of the same tactics as his peers: ruthless acquisitions, stomping on the little guys (like the fractured Chinese states), and not a few illegal activities. No corp suit builds a top-tier megacorporation with their shit smelling like roses.
- 2XL

After their initial stupendous growth, things seemed to slow down for the lotus corp. The Japanese competitors finally started to take this Chinese upstart seriously and put up serious impediments to their growth. For a time, Wuxing dropped quietly out of the headlines. Until, of course, they were thrown back into the spotlight with a bang. Literally.

When a certain dragon was elected president and then subsequently blown to bits in 2057, his will threw Wuxing right back to the top of the headlines. To everyone's massive surprise, Wuxing and its top people were named not just once or twice, but *three* significant times in the late dragon's will. The first, and probably *least* significant (and this is saying something) was no less than 200 million nuyen, given "per our previous agreement." Though no one has ever disclosed exactly what that agreement was, the money ended up in Wuxing's magical research division.

- I still know of parties that would pay a drekload of nuyen to know exactly what that agreement was.
- Lei Kung

The second item that turned heads was the Third Coin of Luck, which legend generally associates with Fertility. This was gifted to Wu's wife, Sharon Chang-Wu. Remember that item for later.

Finally, the big man himself, Wu Lung-Wei, was granted the artifact known as the Jade Dragon of Wind and Fire. Any *one* of these bequests would have been memorable, but all *three* almost caused the drekstorm of the century. The only thing that saved Wuxing from facing more heat was the fact that so much was going on with the dragon's will nobody could keep track of it all. What happened in the next few years, though, was a series of events that no one could ignore.

Wuxing's business growth in the last few decades had been solid, impressive even, but their growth after 2057 was nothing short of spectacular. Every move they made turned out to be perfect. They moved stock at its peak price, they acquired businesses for a bargain right before they made a major breakthrough, they released a brand-new product just in time for it to take off as a cultural phenomenon, and every risky research project turned out a major breakthrough. Within a year they had gained a seat on the Corporate Court and become a full-fledged AAA.

- You might even say their success was "magical."
- Winterhawk

- Is that your typical cheeky way of saying you know something?
- Glitch

- When it comes to corporate knowledge of the arcane, no one exceeds Wuxing except for perhaps Aztechnology. The location of their Hong Kong office was chosen to tap into the magical energies converging at that location, and the Jade Dragon served as a powerful locus to enhance those energies. Considering all of the magical power that Wu had coursing through his office, is it any wonder that he could do no wrong?
- Winterhawk

- So what's the use of having this dragon around? What does it do?
- Hedge Warlock

- The Jade Dragon of Wind and Fire is a statue of three fish leaping out of water. It is about one meter in height and weighs about twenty-five kilograms, carved apparently of jade in a warm green color.
- Winterhawk

- But what does it *do*?
- Hedge Warlock

- Magic artifacts such as this one are reluctant to be pinned down.
- Winterhawk

- Was that your best Man-of-Many-Names imitation?
- Snopes

Their astounding success drew the attention of many potential allies to their side. Wuxing used its considerable financial resources and newfound business acumen to put many small corporations around the Pacific Rim back to a position that they hadn't been in since prior to the first Crash. Steadily, they were building that anti-Japanese corporate alliance that the Wu family had long dreamed of. The knockout blow came when Yamatetsu shockingly moved their headquarters to Vladivsotok and joined Wuxing's little club. In 2059 the papers were signed, and the Pacific Prosperity Group was officially formed.

Things peaked for the lotus corp in 2061. It was quite the year, for those of you that remember, with the return of Haley's Comet causing all sorts of chaos all over the world. For the Wu family, it was a banner year at home. Sharon Chang-Wu gave birth to quintuplet girls. Remember that coin she was given? The one that legends associate with fertility? The legends continue. Since the moment of their birth, the quints have been quite a cultural force; I'll have more on them later. The magical energies suffusing the Wuxing Skytower also seemed to hit their peak in '61, with the whole building becoming an *astral shallow*, with astral space becoming visible to the mundane in the immediate area. But, just like so many other weird and wonderful things that happened in '61, the magic ebbed, and so did Wuxing's "Midas touch," so to speak. While they continued to have solid success and solid growth, their out-of-this-world luck had finally left them.

- The realignment of the worldwide mana flow intersecting at their office was no accident.
- Man-of-Many-Names

- You have proof?
- Kia

- I know the ones who did it, but not who hired them.
- Man-of-Many-Names

The next major shakeup came when Crash 2.0 hit. While the big corps had enough cash in the bank to take the hit, most of the smaller ones didn't. Never one to waste an opportunity, Wuxing swooped in to take over many of their erstwhile allies, the most significant being the Malaysian Independent Bank. This acquisition ruffled more than a few feathers with their megacorp ally Evo (once Yamatetsu). Tension continued to build in the PPG, and Wuxing must really have been feeling it when they rammed through the approval of Aztechnology bid to join. To say this was controversial would be an understatement.

At this point the cracks really started to show in Wuxing's once-spotless businesses empire. Relations with its former allies were becoming more strained by the day, and competition from the Japanese corporations (and around the globe for that matter) wasn't exactly letting up. Maersk started to seriously challenge the corp in their traditional business stronghold of shipping, a corporate battleground that exists to this day. When knowledge of the CFD virus finally got to the public, and "blame" landed on Evo, it was the last straw in their increasingly fragile friendship. For the sake of good PR, Wuxing cut pretty much all business ties with Evo and publicly condemned their actions.

- While quickly sweeping all the evidence of their involvement in the project under the rug.
- Kay St. Irregular

The PPG now mostly exists just on paper, without much in the way of serious cooperation or assistance between the corporations. Aztechnology—never a good fit for the group from the beginning—hasn't contributed much for Wuxing except for handing them a few new shipping contracts.

The last big milestone for Wuxing was something that I'm sure everyone (at least, those who watch the corporate news) saw on the trid: the stepping down of Wu Lung-Wei as CEO for "health reasons" and being replaced by none other than his wife Sharon Chang-Wu. This may have been surprising for those not watching the corp, but for those with an ear to the inside it was a formalization of what was an internal reality for quite some time. Relations at the top of Wuxing have not been dull for quite some time.

That brings you up to speed on where things are now for a timeline. Let's focus on what all this history has built.

OPERATIONS

Wuxing has seen its share of ups and downs over the past few years, and lately it's been mostly downs. In some areas their operations have stayed the same as they always have, but in other areas they are trying out new things.

FINANCES

The bread and butter, gearbox, wheelhouse, backbone (whatever other word you want to use) of Wuxing has and likely always will be finances. Daddy Wu built the beginnings of this monstrosity by amalgamating financial services corporations, and at its heart that is still what Wuxing is today. That means nuyen, and a whole host of other currencies, and lots of it. But don't get carried away thinking there are big vaults filled with credsticks that you can swim in if you can just crack the lock—this money exists almost exclusively electronically. It's money that exists in bank balances, share numbers, and valuation statements.

- This just means that—for those of us who live in that electronic world—there *is* a vault filled with money that we can swim in.
- Slamm-0!

Wuxing's subsidiaries in the finance industry are pretty much too numerous to list, but a few notable ones are: Wuxing Financial Services, Prosperity Development Corporation, Warren Wealth Management, Fidelity Mutual Insurance Corporation, Morgan and Chase Corporation, and Malaysian (not so) Independent Bank. This means that Wuxing provides every kind of financial services product you can think of, and probably a bunch that you can't understand without a double major in business administration and calculus. This includes: lending in all its forms, bonds, insurance, accounting services, fund management, investments, financial planning and advice, as well as plain old banking. What does that all mean in the end? It means that Wuxing or one of its subsidiaries is behind almost everything, financially speaking. If it is money, or costs money, then someone from Wuxing is likely to have their grubby fingers all over it.

In the past, this has been the solid foundation that Wuxing has used to build and finance a great deal of its other operations. Financial products and services return high profits and require much less in the way of investment and infrastructure. They don't require big factories that suck in expensive energy, are cheap and easy to send all over the globe, and are based on a resource that is plentiful everywhere and easy to harvest. The only thing that can really knock a large-scale, properly diversified financial industry is a worldwide catastrophe, and there can't be too many of those, right?

Right. We certainly have had more than our share of large-scale disasters lately, and all of them have shaken up the global finance industry in a big way—and that means hitting Wuxing. Consequently, this perennial powerhouse of a division has lost a great deal of its rock-star status. Standard procedures, safe investments and sound planning are not getting it done anymore. Since taking over the job after his predecessor's resignation, Xiu Luo has brought an entirely new set of rules to Wuxing's finance division.

So while to the *public* and the *shareholders,* the statements were the same corporate rah-rah and mumbo-jumbo about refocusing on priorities, getting back to strengths, and building on core business competencies, internally, I can tell you that it was a whole new direction. Doing business by the book and by the *law* was not good enough anymore—it was time to "think laterally." What does that mean? That means you can't just do good research and make an educated guess about whether a company was a good acquisition for the corp—you had to guarantee that it was a good acquisition. That means breaking in and taking a look at the books or the research to find the real story. If there was something there, then it was time to sabotage the company, or stall their business *just enough* to buy the shares on the cheap. Then all the problems suddenly disappear, everything clears up, and the shares take a big jump. If a company or a mutual fund is about to be sold, great care is taken to ensure that the product or company is thoroughly gutted of anything potentially useful or valuable.

- This isn't much different from what every corp does, is it?
- 2XL

- In general, perhaps, but Wuxing's thoroughness and attention to detail has taken this to an entirely new level. Xiu really has taken the idea of "squeeze every nuyen" to extremes. They lost a lot when things got out of their control. They are not going to let that happen again.
- Mr. Bonds

The other area that Xiu overhauled—pretty much recreated, in fact—was the Financial Information Services division (FIS). I've seen these men and women work, and I don't think that any corporation has a better financial analysis division than Wuxing has right now. Room upon room is filled with the FIS staff, poring over reports and combing through records, backed by the most powerful Matrix data warehouse that I have ever encountered.

- A hugely powerful host filled with juicy paydata? Is this guy just trying to make me hot?
- Netcat

Their aim is to not miss a single detail and find ways to squeeze out the nuyen that all the other corporations overlook. They know how to follow the trail of money, find hidden ownership through innumerable shell companies, and they are starting to be able to predict even small shifts in trends and ownership. Here's an example of the kind of work they are doing for Wuxing: Recently a Wuxing subsidiary acquired the faltering Pesa PKP corporation in eastern Europe. They got it for a song after Pesa overstretched themselves, including a monstrous construction project. FIS found that the project was bonded for an unusually large amount, and that the bond was underwritten by a company owned by major European rival S-K. After putting all this information together, Wuxing agents promptly *sabotaged their own construction project*, causing a total failure. This triggered the condition on the bond allowing them to collect on the amount. In one quick operation, they dumped a dud of an asset in the gaudy and unnecessary office building, picked up the tidy sum of the construction bond, and picked the pocket of a major megacorp rival.

- I can confirm that Wuxing has gathered, through coercion or conscription, some of the best corporate financial minds in the world today. They are taking this very seriously.
- Mr. Bonds

- Why should we be afraid of a bunch of weak-ass pulse pushers?
- DangerSensei

- They may not be able to put a bullet or magical blast into you, but they can empty your bank account from the other side of the globe or cause every source of income around you to dry up.
- Mr. Bonds

- That's why I keep mine on cold hard credsticks under the mattress.
- Bull

- Great ghost, you're old.
- Chainmaker

SHIPPING AND LOGISTICS

A close second to their financial decision is Wuxing's shipping and logistics division, the second leg on which the Wuxing corporate giant was built, going all the way back to the beginning. Just like financial services, shipping has been a traditional stronghold of the company, an area that their marketing touts as a competitive edge. Just like financial services, it's taken some severe blows in the last few years. With the logo of Wuxing Worldwide Shipping being the most recognizable brand on ships today, and the fact that their HQ overlooks one of the world's busiest ports, Wuxing's

monopoly on shipping in the Pacific was once thought unassailable. But, as is the story too many times, as soon as a company thinks it can't be bested in a field, that's when it gets sloppy. Wuxing's dominance in the shipping and logistics sector is more precarious than it has ever been, with three major blows recently affecting it.

The first hit was the collapse of the PPG. A lot of shipping business came from ferrying goods to the islands of the South Pacific; taking raw materials to manufacturing centers on the mainland, and sending finished products to population centers. The nominal discounts on shipping rates offered by Wuxing to PPG members meant that it was a deal too good to pass up for the small corps trying to compete, and the discount never really affected the bottom line. When those smaller corps started to collapse, those shipping contracts dried up, and even in the cases where Wuxing took the opportunity to acquire the baby corp, that just meant that money was changing hands between different branches of the same corporate family. When the volcanoes in the Ring of Fire exploded during the Year of the Comet, severe damage was done to ports and harbors that never had a chance to recover before the second Crash hit. When the corporate alliance with Evo began to sour, the "sister" corp turned from companion to competitor, and Wuxing found itself assailed on more sides than it had been for some time. The bid to bring Aztechnology into the PPG only soured relations further and in the end did not significantly affect the bottom line. The once-friendly waters of the South Pacific, a traditional "home ground," started to look like a hostile foreign country.

Second is the increasing competition with Maersk. For many years now, Wuxing has been competing with Maersk in the area of worldwide mass cargo movements. In the past that competition has been healthy and not particularly threatening to Wuxing on a large scale. However, things recently made a dramatic change. Maersk has identified a major opportunity with the Megacorporate Audit. They have long coveted AAA status and have felt slighted and overlooked by the corporate elite. The audit has given them an unprecedented opportunity, and they are throwing everything they've got into capitalizing on it. With Wuxing weakened and reeling on multiple fronts, Maersk has launched into them in a serious way. When shipping contracts go up for tender, they make sure they underbid Wuxing if nothing else. If that doesn't work, they exert other influences to win the bid, or at least spoil the deal. Wherever they have sufficient influence, they make sure Wuxing cargoes are plagued with delays and unnecessary paperwork. Security breaches and an unheard of rash of mechanical failures have struck Wuxing-owned shipping companies on a massive scale. Thanks to their wildly unpopular corporate actions in the South Pacific in the last decade or so, Wuxing has found itself with very few allies in this embattled region.

- None of those problems are any random accidents, either. Maersk is waging a serious shadow war against Wuxing.
- Baka Dabora

- The real winners in a situation like that are runners like us. There's no shortage of work on the waves these days.
- DangerSensei

Wuxing is far from taking these threats lying down, and they have chosen the waters off of east Africa as their battle ground. Maersk has made significant gains in the region, and Wuxing appears determined to cut the legs out from under their rival. Pirate activity in the region is up over three hundred percent in the last quarter, with the attackers seeming better equipped and more successful than any previous time in the region.

- Three guesses as to who is training and equipping (and impersonating!) those pirates. I'll give you a hint: It has an "x" in it ...
- Baka Dabora

- The most surprising thing about the pirate attacks has been the amount of magical punch that they have brought. Every raid has been backed by a cadre of spirits, or a magician of some kind slinging spells, or both. Magic is used to hide the approach of the pirates, or overwhelm the target with one well-placed manaball. Existing security forces just couldn't compete.
- Ethernaut

Despite increasing investment for protection in the region, nobody had been able to make a serious dent in the pirate activities until a small regional corporation stepped in: Suez Securities Consulting. Shipping concerns that have employed the upstart have seen a slow but steady drop in losses due to pirate activity. Suez Securities claims this is due to the "unique cultural challenges" of the region, and the fact that the pirate activity required "local ingenuity" to solve. Images of much-needed food and medical supplies arriving in the region, prominently watched over by SSC personnel, have been all over the local trid and grid news services.

- Very clever. Wuxing, through a great number of intermediary companies, recently acquired a controlling share in Suez Securities Consulting.
- Mr. Bonds

- None of us should be surprised that a corp would engage in a protection racket on a regional scale.
- Kane

Third was the *Li Na* incident. I'm sure most of you saw the trid coverage, but for those of you living off

the grid or whatever, I'll recap. The *Li Na* was a large cargo ship owned by Wuxing Worldwide Shipping that had a fateful last voyage. While passing a cruise liner off the coast of the Philippines, her rudder failed, causing her to turn directly into the path of the liner. A major collision was avoided by the quick response of the liner's captain, but the emergency maneuvers caused the liner to run aground and suffer catastrophic systems failure. Despite some heroic actions by the crew of the liner, the incident ended up being one of the worst maritime disasters in recent memory. Of the over 2,500 passengers on board, less than half survived. Numerous women and children were among the casualties. The crew fared even worse, with less than a third of the 1,200 crew among the survivors. Actions of the crew were touted as "heroic" by the media, and Wuxing's part in causing the accident was called "deplorable." The whole situation turned into a PR nightmare, as investigating authorities turned up more and more damning evidence about the *Li Na*. She was overloaded with cargo according to safety regulations, she was carrying hazardous goods that were not on her stated manifest (which she also had no permit to carry), and her crew was overworked, inexperienced, and understaffed. Worst of all, maintenance records seized from her last stop clearly showed that her mechanical faults were well-known and ignored. All of this together created the perfect storm of bad press and public outrage against Wuxing Worldwide Shipping.

- That steering accident was no random malfunction. The cold bastards that did it didn't even give a frag when the pictures of the dead kids went viral across the grids.
- Pistons

- The evidence at port was also planted. Clearly a textbook PR assassination run. Well planned and executed.
- Clockwork

- Except for those families that ended up as casualties.
- Glitch

- Wake me up when corps start caring.
- Clockwork

All of this has certainly brought Wuxing's shipping division down a level, but they aren't out by any stretch. They have refocused and are even more determined to take back the market for Wuxing. First, to avoid the bad press, they have shifted away from WWS as their primary brand. They acquired a few other small to mid-range shipping concerns out of various ports and are silently operating in the guise of those companies. Don't be fooled, though—the money is all going to the same place. Second, they're starting to take a lot more risks in the kind of cargo they are shipping. They're not pulling any punches in using their extraterritorial shipping warehouses to essentially legally smuggle goods from one place to another. Finally, they have really stepped things up in the shadow assets department. Wuxing shipping managers are resolved to not get caught with their proverbial pants down again. Shadow activities range from the fairly predictable sabotage of the competition and extra protection for risky shipments, to the more exotic ops like planting evidence, blackmail, elaborate misinformation, and infiltration. There is no shortage of work for shadow assets in the South Pacific these days.

- I can confirm that. I've been hopping islands and pulling jobs for months straight now, and there doesn't seem to be any let up coming. Now I just need to live through it to spend the nuyen.
- Sounder

- I'll add another category that our informant here doesn't seem to be aware of: Arms Dealing

  While the big W always dabbled in arms, they have made a much bigger commitment to it lately. There have been regular shipments from Wuxing-connected (unofficial of course) facilities to various warlords among the Chinese states. This has, predictably, cranked up the level of conflict among the Chinese rivals, and Wuxing seems perfectly happy to stir the pot of war. Despite always pledging exclusive support, I know full well that they are supplying all sides of the conflict, and some of the warlords are starting to get wise to it, making some not-so-veiled threats. Far from deterring them, Wuxing smugglers have simply brought in extra muscle to protect the shipments, as well as setting up decoys and honey pot traps to throw the dim-witted warlords off the trail. All that means is that there's more work for people like us—if you don't mind running guns.
- Red Anya

CONSUMER GOODS

Everyone seems to know that Wuxing is big in finances and shipping, but many overlook the significant holdings the corp has in consumer goods and low-scale manufacturing. Wuxing has always had a large piece of the consumer goods pie in east Asia, and their acquisitions after Crash 2.0 made that position even more dominant. I know it doesn't look like it with the thousands of different brands that exist, but if you are able to follow the ownership lines, you'll be hard pressed to find one that doesn't trace back to Wuxing.

- I created such a map once. It resembled an insect with thousands of legs, but Wuxing was still very much in the middle. The money doesn't lie.
- Mr. Bonds

Wuxing consumer goods holdings run the gamut of products: foodstuffs, soft drinks, commlinks, personal electronics, fashion, and personal vehicles. Improving their position in the vehicle market was a personal project of Sharon Chang-Wu. She turned the rebranded ESSY motors into a profitable, if unspectacular, acquisition. Unlike many of the embattled divisions of the company, the consumer goods department has seen unspectacular but steady growth. Their near total dominance of the east Asian and South Pacific markets has led them to expand aggressively into the west coast of North America, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe. This last area of the expansion has brought them into conflict with Saeder-Krupp. Previously they had little contact with the dragon corp, but lately the relationship has heated up quite a bit. The two megacorps have clashed numerous times in the consumer goods and light manufacturing market, with Wuxing—surprising many—making steady gains.

Notably, Wuxing still has little to no presence in the software field. Their Japanese and Korean rivals have too much history and expertise in the field for the Hong Kong corp to compete in a meaningful way. That hasn't stopped them from cranking out generic and affordable (read: cheap and easily broken) "alternative" devices. Somehow, they have even managed to get these low-grade rip-offs to run their competitors' software. They have branded these products as a benefit to the consumer, giving them a low-cost alternative to the "overpriced" proprietary hardware provided by their Japanese rivals. Your average citizen misses the fact that Wuxing's knock-off products either break or fall out of date quickly. All the buyers seem to see is the ultra low price, and so they are perfectly happy to dump the old model and buy the next piece of junk that rolls off the assembly line.

- Why are the Japanacorps just letting this happen?
- 2XL

- I have many clients that would pay a big bag of credsticks to know how Wuxing is doing it. With every new release, the pulse-heads in the Japanacorps try some new method of protecting their software so that it will only run on their

devices, and every time Wuxing finds a way around it. They may not have much expertise in creating software, but they certainly seem to have the know-how to crack it.
- Kia

- Ever hear of the Conglomerate? It's a group of AIs and TMs who have some "Great Work" that they are trying to achieve. I heard that Wuxing struck a deal with them—they crack software, while Wuxing gives them the time and grid resources they need for the Great Work. But no one knows what it is, or what it will do when they're done.
- Plan 9

- That's complete bullshit. The answer is way simpler: Wuxing farmed the software work out to the Triads, plain and simple.
- Snopes

I'd be overlooking something major if I didn't also mention that good old staple of chip manufacturing. It's always been a thing in Hong Kong, and it isn't going away anytime soon. Wuxing has a solid lock on the chip manufacturing industry—and they ship them wherever they need to go in the world. Of course, they never have been effective in shutting down the stream of chips that end up as infamous "Kong Chip" BTLs on the black market. While the Triads are far from being controlled by the corp, they certainly seem to have found a healthy working relationship. With both of them benefiting, they're not going to stop any time soon.

MAGICAL GOODS AND SERVICES

Wuxing continues to be a strong player in the market of magical goods supply. This includes harvesting raw telesma, materials, and components for use in alchemy, rituals, or foci production. The field is still highly competitive, so Wuxing is creating a niche and a brand for itself by letting the "other guys" do the mass production of cheap goods while they focus on quality over quantity. Additionally, they used their considerable expertise and the corporate culture of eastern magic to focus on materials and formulae specifically suited to the kinds of magic most commonly practiced outside of North America or Europe. Their highly integrated shipping and logistics services allow these highly sensitive and specialized goods to be delivered to customers around the globe in an efficient manner without spoiling the materials in the process. Although the volume is low, the profits are high since consumers are willing to pay the premium cost for premium products.

- What the hell? Am I reading a fragging ad for Wuxing magical goods?
- Puck

- Although sounding a lot like corporate marketing, the statements above are definitely true. Anyone who is not a practitioner of the arts wouldn't understand fully how important it can be that raw magical materials not be harvested by machine, not spend too much time in transit or storage after being harvested, or spoiled through improper or sloppy handling.
- Winterhawk

The second major branch in this division is magical services. Wuxing geomancers are second to none in what they do, and they are highly sought after. They charge an exorbitant fee, but if you really want the best then the fee isn't really a question. Along with high-margin magical consulting work, Wuxing also has brands that perform more standard magical services, including contracted research, education, training, and good old fashioned security. In particular, their security companies offer very competitive packages on setting up wards, and providing spirit summoning services. The new hot wonder child of a company in this division is Awakened Protection Initiatives, which provides the services of trained Awakened critters for security use. Profit numbers from this new start-up after just a few months of full operation have caught the attention of a few big wigs. Look for this to be a field that Wuxing puts more resources into expanding.

MEDICAL SERVICES

The other area in which Wuxing has significant assets that may surprise people is medical services. While not an area that most people immediately associate with the Wuxing corporate empire, the company (primarily through its subsidiaries) owns a large number of medical companies providing a wide variety of products and services. These include cyberware and bioware installation, cosmetic surgery and rejuvenation treatments, magical healing, and standard medical care. This division, along with financial, was the other one to grow the most during the post Crash 2.0 acquisition period, where Wuxing snapped up smaller doomed corporations for a bargain. While a good portion of them bring the East Asian culture and practices that one would expect from Wuxing, the majority of their holdings have very different brands and cultures.

What ties them all together, though, is a universal denial (publicly) of nanotechnology and anything that could associate them with the PR disaster of CFD. After spending so many years being all chummy with Evo and generating a positive public image between the two corps, Wuxing did a rapid job of tearing that image down when things went south for Evo's public image. Their partnership through the PPG had been deteriorating steadily over the last few years, and this latest incident was the last straw. Marketing material com-

ing out of Wuxing's medical companies has stopped just short of shouting "We don't have anything to do with Evo!" Ever the opportunist, Wuxing took the drop in stock prices as the right time to take over many of the medical companies owned by their one-time ally. Evo, taking exception to many of Wuxing's actions in the recent past, took great offense to the betrayal. The two corps have been trading blows over medical assets ever since.

- Indeed. The two are acting just as bad as—or worse than—a bitter divorced couple. There is no enemy more bitter than one who used to be your friend. In many cases, Wuxing and Evo have used knowledge and assets that they had in place when they were cooperating to target their runs for maximum effectiveness. Runs between these rivals in this field have been particularly vicious, with Mr. Johnsons having a total disregard (or even offering a bonus!) for collateral damage.
- Baka Dabora

- I bet the Japanacorps are loving seeing the two former rivals fight among themselves.
- Hard Exit

- Many of those runs are sponsored by a Japanese rival in order to frame Wuxing or Evo, just to keep the conflict going.
- Baka Dabora

Of note among the medical-services arm of Wuxing is their ever-increasing presence in the market of armed medical response. They have always had a presence in this market, but their growth in on-the-ground medical facilities (like clinics and hospitals) has allowed for further expansion. Wuxing response teams are well trained and equipped, having a higher-than-average number of Awakened on their teams. A long history and corporate culture of sensitivity to magic and its specialized needs has allowed them to be more successful serving Awakened clients than their rivals. Marketing material touting their extremely low incidence of magic loss due to critical injury appear to be working.

- That's no mere corporate spin or buzz word. As a mage, knowing that your medical provider can preserve your abilities in critical situations is worth paying for.
- Ethernaut

As with its consumer goods and light manufacturing, Wuxing has expanded its medical and armed medical response market into Eastern Europe, bringing it again into direct competition with Saeder-Krupp. Innovative approaches and cagey strategy have given them success, with Wuxing now being the second-largest provider of armed medical response in Europe. Whether this success will stick, or if they have now just drawn the full attention of the European powerhouse, time will tell.

- Time will eventually tell, but the result will be determined by the shadow battles that ensue.
- Cosmo

MAJOR PLAYERS

Here is a rundown on some of the most important and influential people inside Wuxing today. Some are the big names that pull strings behind the scenes, and some are names and faces that you may see on the street, fighting on the front lines for the corp.

SHARON CHANG-WU

For some it may have been a surprise when Sharon Chang-Wu was named CEO, but for those inside the company and those of us who watch it closely, it was simply a formal recognition of the power she already had and the role she was already doing. Sharon has always worked quietly but efficiently behind the scenes to keep the company running, but as Wu Lung-Wei's actions became more desperate and erratic, she had to step in to fill the void. While Wu was looking for the magic fix (literally) that would easily eliminate all of Wuxing's woes, Sharon worked to help the company with old-fashioned business sense.

Sharon had enough when Wuxing lost a multi-million-nuyen shipping contract due to Wu's neglect. It was a major deal at a time when Wuxing really needed it, and it was significant enough that the CEO had to sign off on it. Sharon had been the one working the long hours in the boardrooms to hammer out all the details of the deal, and all Wu needed to do was put his name on it. Despite everything in his AR blaring at him to "Come and sign the fucking thing" he couldn't be bothered on his quest for the latest magical knickknack. The time limit expired and the deal fell through, and to say that Sharon was pissed would be an understatement the size of Hong Kong. "Hell hath no fury" and all that. This was the punctuation point on a litany of neglect and mismanagement issues that had been building over the last few years. Sharon took it to the board, and after a marathon meeting that supposedly took more than thirty hours, the decision was made: Wu was out, Sharon was in.

In her time officially and unofficially running the company, Sharon Chang-Wu has displayed an extraordinary amount of business sense and exceptional diplomacy. She has forged strategic alliances where necessary and smoothed over more than a few ruffled feathers from Wuxing's previous actions. Although she has built her reputation and most of her success to date on old-fashioned, tried-and-true business moves, she is certainly not above going the unconventional (or illegal)

route for corporate success. Of late she has displayed remarkable resiliency and an ability to adapt her thinking to face new challenges. As Wuxing has been attacked on all sides in its traditional business markets, she knew that radical new strategies would be needed. To that end, she has brought on the right kind of people and let them do what is necessary to turn things around, giving them a great deal of autonomy in how they do their jobs. She sets the high-level goals and lets them use whatever methods they feel will best achieve them. This also gives her fantastic plausible deniability if any of them get caught doing something untoward, but that no doubt is all part of her strategy.

Physically, Sharon is short at about 1.55 meters, with black hair kept short and business-like. Her physical trainer (and her full corporate schedule) keep her fit and trim. Despite (or maybe because of) her slight frame and small size, Sharon marches around corporate offices like she's about to ram through the walls instead of going around them, and her presence in the boardroom is more than enough to humble any executive who overlooks her because she is a woman. Those who have underestimated her have repeatedly been proven wrong, and yet some still do. Most of the time, she has a soft and disarming tone, used when negotiating and to avoid giving offense. When required, she fires up a tone and volume level that doesn't even seem possible for a small Asian woman, but it has been more than sufficient to bring any wayward employee back into line.

In short, anyone who thinks that she hasn't earned this position or has the skills and temperament to keep it is sorely mistaken.

JAMES HARPER-SMYTHE

In almost every conceivable way, James Harper-Smythe is the living embodiment of the "old guard" of Hong Kong, an avatar of its history and origins. The Harper-Smythe family is one of the most recognized and well-respected in Hong Kong, tracing its roots all the way back to the former British masters of the city before it was handed over to the then nation-state of China. The Harper-Smythes were also instrumental in pushing for the city's independence, working in conjunction with the Wu family to make Hong Kong the city it is today. James Harper-Smythe is one of the true elder statesmen of the corporate world. Even though he is well into his eighties now, his recent rejuvenation treatments should keep him spry for many years to come.

James is a perfect mix of diplomat and dictator, magnetic and malevolent. He has worked out deals and agreements with very hostile parties, and he's also made a good number of heinous betrayals. He is a man who has been in the cutthroat corporate game his entire life, and he plays it like he is speaking his native language. He has a long vision, a long memory, and is always playing to win.

For all his long years on the board, he has been the strongest and staunchest ally to Wu family, but to Sharon Chang-Wu in particular. As Wu Lung-Wei's behavior began to get more erratic, Harper-Smythe was the first notable board member to throw support behind Sharon Chang-Wu. Their close relationship and numerous clandestine meetings continue to fuel rumors of an inappropriate angle to their relationship, but no hard evidence of it has ever been produced (believe me, people have tried). James was instrumental in Sharon's successful move into the CEO chair and has worked tirelessly before and afterward to support her. He acts as her closest adviser and confidant but is certainly not afraid to challenge her on important issues, even publicly. More importantly, he works to ensure that Sharon has the best image possible. When needed, he uses his considerable diplomatic skills to spread good PR on her behalf, but he also does the dirty work that he knows needs to be done, keeping Sharon's hands clean.

Since his rejuvenation, James has been enjoying the indulgences that come with being (or at least looking) youthful. Despite a high degree of security and privacy surrounding his movements, James has been spotted enjoying the hospitality of some of Hong Kong's luxurious pleasure palaces. At every corporate social event he has a new piece of arm candy ripped from the virtual pages of Hong Kong fashion magazines.

Those who oppose Sharon Chang-Wu know that they'll need to take James Harper-Smythe out of the picture as well, so there is plenty of work looking for and testing any potential weaknesses lurking behind his stalwart image.

WU LUNG-WEI

At one time Wu Lung-Wei was the architect of Wuxing's greatest period of success, its golden age. Now is a very different time for the company, and he has a very different role. Although he was only recently officially ousted as CEO, Wu had not been really functioning as the CEO for a much longer time. As with many things of this nature, the exact time when he began to change is hard to determine. Some place it as early as the moment he received the Jade Dragon of Wind and Fire, others place it later, but universally there is no doubt that Wu has changed over the last few years. He always had an interest in ancient artifacts of an arcane nature, and his business practices were often risky or out of the ordinary, but during the period of his transition all of these aspects became heightened, intensified. Gradually, these traits began to take over the rest of his personality to the point of being obsessed about them. With more and more time focused on his obsessions, less and less time was being given to the day-to-day essentials of running a megacorporation.

- No one in that gigantic gazillion-nuyen corporation did anything about this?
- 2XL

- To be sure, there were some who did—see the entries on Sharon Chang-Wu and James Harper-Smythe—but there are always politics in a large corporation. How do you send the boss of a megacorp to see a shrink? Can you force your CEO to take a stress leave?
- Kia

- Those are all mundane explanations. This seems like a classic case of magical influence to me.
- Lyran

- Wouldn't all of the mages and geomancers wandering around Wuxing have spotted something like that already?
- Lei Kung

- There are things in this world that can exercise magic in very subtle but incredibly powerful ways.
- Man-of-Many-Names

Although the anti-Wu camp (if you can call it that) won a victory in the end to get him removed, Wu still had way too many allies within the company to be removed entirely. Instead, he was reassigned to an area much more "suited to his current interests." That is to say, his detractors stuck him in a division where they thought he wouldn't cause too much trouble. Wu now heads up a nebulous and ill-defined "Special Acquisitions" division. Publicly, the division is responsible for "acquiring assets of intrinsic value to the corporation, in order to increase its overall net worth." In truth they have a healthy budget and access to a large variety of special and quasi-legal resources to go and get whatever Wu and his allies think may be useful. This has (allegedly) included magical artifacts, other companies, land, and people.

Wu still wields considerable political influence within the corporation, as many wealthy and powerful people owe their positions to him. Still others see allying themselves with Wu as an opportunity for advancement or to get something for themselves out of it. For these reasons and others, Wu is still a figure to be reckoned with in Wuxing, even after his removal as CEO. That's certainly not to say that he is entirely benevolent. The dirty gossip around the corporation has it that his obsession with

magical artifacts continues, or has even grown. Those who thought they had Wu's protection and friendship have found themselves sold out or betrayed for Wu to acquire his latest prize. Still other, more scandalous reports say that he displays talent or insights into magical affairs that a mundane would not (or should not) have. Wu has never admitted to a magical awakening, and those I know who have gotten close enough to examine him cannot see any sign of magical talent, but the reports persist nonetheless.

- It is certainly not unheard of for individuals to have a latent awakening later in life.
- Winterhawk

- But one that isn't visible when examined astrally?
- Lyran

- The abilities could be coming from a source that is not within him. There are several possible sources. All of these have dark or dangerous implications.
- Man-of-Many-Names

As Wu continues—thrives, some say—in his new role, he is also the central figure in a growing divide within the company. Many people are not happy with the installment of Sharon Chang-Wu as CEO or the power that James Harper-Smythe now exerts. There is growing tension within the corporation as it is under attack on all sides by its long-time competitors and former allies, and a brand-new CEO attempts to navigate the former naval superpower through these turbulent waters.

FU PENG

A fixture on the board of Wuxing since its inception, Fu Peng is as mysterious and enigmatic as he has ever been. Despite the best efforts (and millions of nuyen) that many people have dedicated to the task, there is precious little information about this individual. What is known for certain: He is a board member, he has attended every single board meeting for Wuxing that has *ever* been held, and he owns approximately fifteen percent of Wuxing. Those are the undisputed facts. Beyond that I can tell you what people have *not* found. Fu Peng has no place of residence, no accounts, no Matrix presence, no death certificate, and no birth certificate that can be conclusively tied to him (despite the thousands of "Fu Pengs" that have been born in Hong Kong). Indeed referring to Fu Peng as "him" is a convention of convenience, because no firm physical description of "him" can be made. There are many reports of people who are *certain* they were talking to Fu Peng that vary dramatically in their description of the individual. Aside from the board meetings that he always unambiguously attends, his exact whereabouts and activities at any other point in time also conflict. Assets tasked with following him either mysteriously lose track, or have him firmly in sight only to receive confirmed reports of Fu Peng appearing at other locations simultaneously. While it is not uncommon for high-ranking corporate players to cloak their movements and use body doubles, Fu Peng has taken the cloak and dagger to an entirely new level.

- Sounds like we're dealing with some sort of spirit or being of unknown power.
- Plan 9

- Isn't that jumping to the craziest conclusion? Isn't it simpler to say that a whole group of people are assuming the identity of Fu Peng? Occam's Razor and all that.
- Cosmo

- But Wuxing uses a bunch of biometrics in their higher-level security. If it was a whole group of people acting as Fu Peng, they would need to have the same fingerprints, retinal pattern, blood type, DNA. I know some of that can be faked, but all of it? For this long?
- DangerSensei

While his exact whereabouts and interactions are unknown, what is known is the considerable power he has in the corporation. Most significantly, his close relationship with Wu Lung-Wei and his opposition to Sharon Chang-Wu and James Harper-Smythe are well established. In general, Fu Peng has been a major driver in pushing a darker and more ruthless agenda for Wuxing, which often clashes with Sharon Chang-Wu and James Harper-Smythe's more traditional direction. He has displayed what can be described as magical abilities, though his status as a magician is not confirmed. Whatever the nature of his talents may be, he has been invaluable in helping Wu Lung-Wei acquire and understand magical artifacts. Many have observed and inferred that Fu Peng is the real driving force behind Wu's obsession in seeking magical artifacts, but his motivations for doing so are unknown.

- Sounds to me like he's looking for something specific.
- Lei Kung

QUINTS

The Wu Quintuplets were international celebrities from the moment they were born, a dramatic display of the (apparent) power of the *Feng* (Fertility) Coin of Luck given to Sharon in Dunkelzahn's Will. The five girls were named after the five essential elements of earth: Fo, Shui, Moak, Tou, and Gum. Despite the best efforts of their mother, they have grown up very much in the public eye, being celebrities in Hong Kong and around the world. Now that they are seventeen and becoming adults, the focus of that attention has changed. Where, or if, they are going

to university is a topic of much discussion, as is endless speculation about their personal lives.

- I'm also sure that no one is happy with them being the focus of sexual fantasies, now that they're getting older. Quint chips started to appear in the BTL scene a couple of years ago, and I've even heard of one bunraku parlor offering a Quint Special with five young girls sculpted to look like them.
- Turbo Bunny

It probably goes without saying, but the Quints are some of the most heavily guarded corporate celebrities in the world. There have been more than one attempt to kidnap them, with most carefully kept out of the media. Wuxing security has spared no expense or trick to try to keep these girls safe, including multiple body doubles, false schedules, and highly discreet security assets. They are fully alert to being sold out from within the corp and are not above looking outside for surreptitious security.

- They actually trust runners to guard the Quints?
- Clockwork

- For sure. I have a chummer who had the job once. They never come right out and tell you exactly who you're protecting, and the girls will be disguised in some way so they're not instantly recognizable, but it's them.
- Sticks

By all accounts, the Quints have good relationships with their mother and father, even if those two are not speaking to each other much anymore. James Harper-Smythe is often seen at social gatherings for the Quints, acting as an honorary grandfather, but also keeping a wary eye out for their protection. The most enigmatic relationship is between the Quints and the equally enigmatic Fu Peng. Despite credible reports about his whereabouts at the best of times, rumors and reports have a high degree of consistency in relaying meetings between the mysterious board member and the children. The nature of these meetings, and what motivation Fu Peng has for this relationship, are all unknown and subject to wild speculation.

Aside from the usual celebrity drivel, other rumors claim that one of the Quints is a magician, though exactly which one changes from rumor to rumor. Others have one of them being a technomancer, but that's likely just jumping to a huge conclusion based on a technical affinity. My absolute favorite, though it's hardly worth mentioning, is that Tou, who is never seen uncovered in public, has been missing for some time. The exact time frame for the disappearance varies from rumor to rumor, anywhere from a few weeks to over eighteen months. The "Tou" that is seen in public is a security double who has been posing in her place so as not to arouse suspicion.

- I can confirm that rumor. Wuxing agents have been looking for Tou for over a year.
- Axis Mundi

- That can't be right. Those girls are watched every nanosecond of every day. Wuxing practically invented a twenty-fifth hour of the day, just to watch them for an extra hour! There's no way that one of them slipped away. Wouldn't we have heard more about it by now?
- Dr. Spin

- If true, this would certainly make sense of the quiet but desperately urgent inquiries and assignments I have heard from some high-level Wuxing shadow assets.
- Kia

- If Wuxing finds out another corp nabbed her, it will be the shitstorm of the century.
- Baka Dabora

- And if another corp doesn't have her, that raises even stranger questions. Where did she go, and why?
- Kia

JING SHI: ADJUSTER

When Xiu Luo took over the finance division for Wuxing, he did some major rearranging. He created new departments, set a new direction, and created new positions. One of those new positions was "adjuster." It sounds very mundane and boring, but it hides a much more savage purpose. Adjusters in the new Wuxing Finance Division are responsible for "fixing" or "adjusting" bad accounts or dud assets in any way possible, legal or otherwise. If a recent acquisition is losing money and it would really be better if the whole place burned down for the insurance, they adjust that. If some high-flying talent accepted a rival company's job offer instead of their own, they make sure that gets adjusted. If an employee is found to be embezzling from the company, they get adjusted out of a job. Or out of breathing.

Jing Shi is a man who has taken to this new role very nicely and risen rapidly up the ranks thanks to his ruthless dedication and creative problem-solving. Through creative manipulation of laws, people, and physical assets, he has adjusted many negatives for Wuxing into positives. He often interacts with outside assets, so if you are running in the Hong Kong or South Pacific scene, you may run into him. He's an ice-cold, completely logical bastard who hardly ever misses a detail and doesn't think twice ordering deaths or blowing something up if it will make a few more nuyen for the company. Everything is weighed as gain or loss in his eyes, so I suggest you don't try to fuck with him. He has no problem disposing of assets if they are more trouble than they're worth.

OPTI
STIM
SHIAWASE

FIN
DRH

PAIN POINTS

Chaos is horrible for business—unless your business is shadowrunning. The Big Ten megacorporations of the Sixth World are reeling, with scandals, disasters, and crippling attacks coming at them from all angles. NeoNET is scrambling to maintain AAA status, Ares is trying not to let the secret rot at the heart of the corp become public, while Aztechnology, fresh from taking on a dragon in Amazonia, is looking at a facedown with another great dragon. And that's not all—every corp is a pile of schemes, turmoil, upheaval, and teetering chaos, because that's how they operate.

Market Panic runs down the state of the Big Ten for *Shadowrun*, providing the background, story developments, and plot hooks players and gamemasters need to add excitement, intrigue, and Sixth World flavor to their adventures and campaigns. If you're going to run for or against the big megacorporations—and that includes all shadowrunners—this is critical information to have so you know what you might get thrown into, who you're going up against, and how you might obtain enough intel to survive.

Market Panic is for use with *Shadowrun, Fifth Edition*.

SHADOWRUN
FIFTH EDITION

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